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Valeriu Gafencu: "The Saint of the Prisons"

Valeriu Gafencu with his mother Elena during his incarceration at Galda, Romania, 1946–47.

From this day, from this hour, from this minute, let us strive to love God above all, and fulfill His holy will.

— St. Herman of Alaska

THE ORTHODOX WORD

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108 Valeriu Gafencu: "The Saint of the Prisons" *by the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood*

156 Communique of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church Regarding New Destruction of Orthodox Churches in Kosovo and Metohija

158 Letters of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (Part II)

178 Complete Valaam Patericon: Schema-archimandrite Cosmas of Valaam and Latvia (Part II, Conclusion) *by Archimandrite Victor (Mamontov)*

Front Cover: Valeriu Gafencu as a student in Iasi, Romania, in 1940.

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The young Valeriu Gafencu, not long before his arrest by the Communists.

To Fr. George Calciu –
who introduced us to
Valeriu Gafencu. Thank-you
so much!
With Love,
Mother Nina

VALERIU GAFENCU: *"The Saint of the Prisons"*

By the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood

1. Introduction

In 1966 the inhuman prison conditions of Communist Romania were brought before the eyes of the Western world. In Washington before the Senate's Internal Security Subcommittee, Pastor Richard Wurmbrand testified to the diabolical experiments being conducted there. The evidence for his case was the witness of the eighteen torture wounds that he revealed as he stripped to the waist before the committee. His story caught the attention of the world media and was published throughout the U.S., Europe and Asia. Soon thereafter, Wurmbrand wrote his book, *Tortured for Christ*, which would eventually sell more than three million copies.

On February 17, 2001, Pastor Wurmbrand passed away at the age of ninety-two in southern California. Although his body was sickly and emaciated, his eyes shone "like a sea of light opening into eternity," as one who saw him in his last days recalls.* The significance of his work of bearing witness to what was really going on behind the Iron Curtain is inestimable. At a time when foreign delegations from the West were

* "Pastor Wurmbrand: Finishing the Race," *Again,* vol. 23, no. 2 (April–June, 2001), p. 27.

being deceived by staged scenes of freedom and prosperity on their brief visits to Moscow or Bucharest, he was one of the first to expose the darkest secrets of the Communist prisons. He told of the tortures and the heroism of the Christian prisoners; he told the stories of many Orthodox confessors. "I have seen Christians in Communist prisons with fifty pounds of chains on their feet," he wrote, "tortured with red-hot iron pokers, in whose throats spoonfuls of salt had been forced, being kept afterward without water, starving, whipped, suffering from cold, and praying with fervor for the Communists. This is humanly inexplicable! It is the love of Christ, which was shed into our hearts."*

In the life of Pastor Wurmbrand there is one event from his Romania prison experience that has been overlooked. This is his friendship with Valeriu Gafencu, remembered by those who knew him as "the Saint of the Prisons." Valeriu Gafencu was the spiritual leader of a group of Orthodox Romanians who "fought the good fight" amidst the wretched conditions of prison life, where the majority could not resist succumbing to the rule of sub-humanism into which they were plunged. Valeriu and his brethren not only resisted, but rose to a height of Christian sanctity that rivaled that of all the greatest confessors of Christianity.

In 1951, both Valeriu and Pastor Wurmbrand were deathly ill with tuberculosis in Targu Ocna, an infirmary prison. Although medicine was almost impossible for prisoners to obtain, one of Valeriu's co-strugglers did manage to receive some in a package from his family. His medical condition having stabilized, he gave it to Valeriu, who was near death. Valeriu, in turn, secretly offered it to Pastor Wurmbrand. The result was that Richard Wurmbrand lived, while Valeriu Gafencu died. Before Valeriu reposed, Pastor Wurmbrand confessed to him, "I would like to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven by the same gateway as you." Valeriu was only thirty years old when he passed from this

* Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (Glendale, Calif.: Diane Books, 1967), p. 57.

world. Interestingly, Richard Wurmbrand was to repose on the eve of the forty-ninth anniversary of Valeriu's repose, thus being linked in death with the man who had once saved his life.

Valeriu as a young student. Photograph taken ca. 1938.

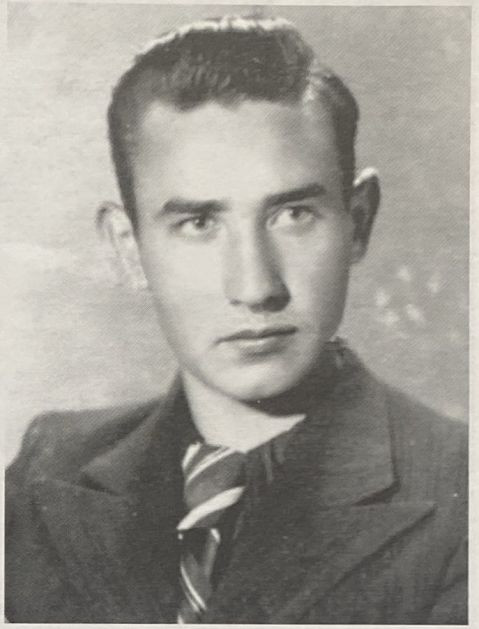
The published memoirs of those who suffered with Valeriu in prison reveal in him a soul made snow-white through conscious suffering for Christ amidst the inhuman tortures and moral degradation of the Communist prisons. In him childlike purity and manly strength were fused—a characteristic rarely seen in our times when the "double-minded man" has become the standard. Valeriu's life of simplicity and singleness of mind calls us—encompassed by the degradation of contemporary life—to "become like little children" and enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. Youth and Arrest

Valeriu was born in 1921 in the northeastern Romanian territory of Bessarabia. His father, Basil, was a landowning farmer, patriot and devout Orthodox Christian. He served as a deputy in Bessarabia's Council, which governed land management. The family possessed about one hundred hectares of land and a thriving farm. Valeriu's mother, Elena, imparted to him a sound Christian education and

Basil Gafencu, Valeriu's father. Standing beside him is Basil's sister, Vera. Seated between them, wearing a black kerchief, is Valeriu's mother, Elena.

warm faith. Valeriu had three younger sisters—Valentina, Eleonora, and Elizabeth. According to Eleonora, Basil "was an ideal father and husband. He possessed an uprightness and goodness rarely found."



Valeriu in 1938, as a high school graduate. This photograph is from his diploma.

The fertile region of Bessarabia is bounded by the Dniester River on the north and the east, the Prut on the west, and the Danube and the Black Sea on the south. There, on the hilly plains and flat steppes, the rich earth brings forth an abundance of fruits and grains, supporting a surplus of livestock. Because of this and its important strategic location, Bessarabia has changed ownership over the centuries numerous times. Around 1920, the people of Bessarabia voted to form a union with Romania. Although the Treaty of Paris recognized the union, the Soviet Union never did. In 1940 Romania was finally forced to yield Bessarabia to the Soviets.

Foreseeing the oppression his family would meet under the Soviet regime, Basil took his family across the Prut River and settled them in the ancient Moldavian capital of Iasi. At this time, Valeriu was a freshman student of Law and Philosophy and entered the university in Iasi. Valentina was a senior in high school, while the younger girls, Nora and Elizabeth, were attending lyceum.

After helping to settle the family in Iasi, Valeriu returned with his father to Bessarabia in order to settle their affairs on the farm. After a

Basil Gafencu in the 1920s.

trustworthy manager was found, the father and son set out again for the Prut. A friend and co-struggler of Valeriu, Virgil Maxim, recounts this dramatic event: "Once this business was arranged, they went straight to the Prut, being forced to secretly swim across. Soviet troops had infiltrated the area up to the river and were trying to thwart the crossing of the daring Bessarabians into their motherland.

"When they arrived on the right bank of the Prut, his father, after a short rest, rose up and thanked God for helping him provide for his family. He embraced his son and made the final confession of his life: 'I have brought you here so that you will take care of your mother and sisters. I charge you with this responsibility before God. I must go back among my own.' Valeriu was troubled. His father observed his emotion and continued: 'What would all our brothers say—our Bessarabian brothers—and how could I raise my eyes to heaven if I and others like me, who until now have fought to preserve the Romanian soul on this land, flee from the path of the oppressor and fail to share in the suffering which awaits us?'

"Valeriu understood the spiritual stance of his father and made no attempt to force him to renounce his decision. Knowing the depth

of his father's conviction, he vowed that, as a worthy son, he would neither deny faith in God nor forget the plight of his nation.

"'Better times will come, but now there is need for sacrifice,' added his father. After embracing his son one more time and making the sign of the Cross, he headed straight for the water and swam back across the Prut, into his beloved Bessarabia. A short time later he was arrested and deported with a group of Romanian Bessarabians beyond the Arctic Circle. There, in terrible living conditions, he died after one year, his thoughts on God, to Whom he had entrusted his loved ones."*

Thus, a new life began for Valeriu in Iasi. Situated on Romania's eastern border, Iasi had always been an important city for the country. The first book in the Romanian language had been published here, and the relics of St. Parasceva had come to rest here in the 17th cenury. At one time Iasi had been the capital of Moldavia, and during World War I it had been the capital of all Romania, when the Germans forces occupied Wallachia. Here, where the Churches of St. Nicholas and the Three Hierarchs guard the city, Valeriu found himself poised to enter into adulthood.

In Iasi, Valeriu proceeded with his studies. He chose law so as to become a defender of his country. He was a greatly gifted young man: exceedingly handsome, intelligent, and popular. With no effort on his part, he had many female admirers. As his friend from youth, Constantine Strachinaru, related: "Through the consistency of his creed, through his culture and uprightness, Valeriu quickly became a leader among the town's youth. He was dynamic, communicative, handsome, modest, restrained, and kind-hearted. He was a veritable pillar of wisdom and an inspired patriot, dreaming of a Romania shining like the sun in the heavens. In fulfillment of this ideal, he dedicated all his energy to the forming of youth in a Christian spirit. The high school students

* *Studentul Valeriu Gafencu,* Memoirs of Virgil Maxim (Napoca Star Publishers, 1998), pp. 51–52.

Commemorative stamp with a portrait of Cornel Codreanu, founder of the Legionnaire movement. Printed in 1940, when the Legionnaires were in power.

were his brothers. Together, near Iasi, the town grown on seven hills, they insatiably drank in the air of the spiritual universe on Romanian soil."

Romania at this time had been suffering from various social ills for many years. In the wake of the depression of 1929, Carol II ascended the throne in 1930. His government was infamous for its corruption and violent repression of the people. At the same time Communist organizations began to creep into Romania, attempting to undermine Orthodox Christianity.

In the late 1920s the Legion of the Archangel Michael originated as a movement to fight the infiltration of Communism into Romania. Its discipline was based on Christian ascetic principles. After entering the realm of politics, however, some of its members lost sight of its original hierarchy of values. Specifically, after the founder, Corneliu Codreanu, was murdered by the regime of Carol II, nine Legionnaires retaliated with the murder of Prime Minister Armand Calinescu in 1939.* In September 1940,

*According to Fr. Arsenius Papacioc, "The Legionnaire movement needed to be seen as the precise following of Christian teaching. Some Legionnaires, however, sinned by killing, and did not realize [their mistake]. This brought about revenge, and all the elite were killed. It was not only the elite of the Legionnaire movement who were killed; it was the elite of our nation." Those like Valeriu Gafencu and Constantine Oprisan (see The Orthodox Word no. 197), who held fast to the true spirit of the movement, proved its original spiritual value by the manifest holiness of their lives and martyric deaths.

Valeriu Gafencu (second from right) with a group of friends in Iasi, 1941.

the Legionnaire movement took power in Romania. For the next four months they ruled while General Antonescu, the General of Defense under Carol II, remained in his former position. In January 1941, Hitler ordered German divisions on Romanian soil to "reestablish order." This amounted to the ousting of the Legionnaires and the installation of Antonescu as dictator. Once in power, Antonescu began a systematic persecution of the Legionnaires, by imprisoning them or sending them off to the Front to certain death.

Meanwhile, Valeriu had become a mentor for other young Christian Romanians in the Brotherhood of the Cross, a youth organization of the Legionnaire movement dedicated to training its members to embody the highest Christian virtues. In 1941, he was arrested with twenty-five other members of the Brotherhood by the Antonescu dictatorship. Constantine Strachinaru recalled: "But, alas! On a fateful day in autumn their song remained suspended in heaven.... Arrests and trials, a merciless public prosecutor, and a harsh judgment ensued. Military men were condemning their own children—students in the military high school. One of the boys was only eleven years old. The tears of their mothers and sisters flowed unceasingly, but their cries were of no avail. Valeriu Gafencu took upon himself all responsibility, pleading for the younger ones to be set free. Still, his courage, honor, and empathy found no sympathy." Aristide Lefa added: "At his trial, Valeriu's civil law professor, Angelescu, on his own initiative, presented Valeriu's defense. He argued, 'It is a sin for such an element to be sent to prison, because it is

society that will lose if he is taken out of its midst. He is one of the best students I have had in all my years of teaching.'"

Valeriu was the only one convicted. He was sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labor.

3. Aiud Prison

From the law school in the old capital, Valeriu was transported across the country to the central region of Alba. Here he was detained in Aiud prison, which would serve as the second school in his spiritual formation. This would be his home for the next five years.

Up to this point, the severity of the Romanian prisons had not reached the level it would later, when the Communists took complete control of the country. Under Antonescu's regime the prisoners could still receive packages and, occasionally, visitors. Upon the arrival of the Communists in 1944, there was an element of disorganization in the prisons due to the transition between the two regimes.* During this period of confusion, Valeriu and others of like mind redeemed the time by increasing their spiritual activities of prayer and contemplation. One close companion, Alexandru Virgil Ioanid, recalled his impressions of Valeriu from this period: "Valeriu Gafencu penetrated into my consciousness suddenly and brightly. I was still free when I discovered that there was in Aiud prison, and later in the labor colony of Galda near Aiud, a youth—a political prisoner—who lived the Christian life, spreading around him a beneficent force which affected the other brothers in suffering and all those with whom he came into contact. He could have been a modern-day Paul. In the midst of trials sent by God, he did not cease to preach, to encourage, and to spiritually raise up those around him into Christian perfection."

* It is interesting to note that all political prisoners were set free by the Communists except the Legionnaires, who had recognized the diabolical nature of Communism, and who had fought against it since its inception in the 1930s in defense of their country and the Orthodox Faith.

A recent photograph of Fr. Arsenius (Anghel) Papacioc.
Once a Legionnaire, he was later a co-struggler of the renowned Elder Cleopa Ilie.

In Aiud he met other fervent young Christian strugglers and members of the Legionnaires such as Anghel Papacioc,* Judge Marian Traian, Traian Trifon and Fr. Vasile Serghie. The prison cell became a spiritual academy. There was an ordered regime of common prayer. Copies of the *Philokalia* were obtained and studied, spiritual discourse was constantly in the air, and the brothers took counsel with each other about their personal struggles. Among these noble souls, Valeriu stood out. According to Virgil Maxim, "God poured forth upon Valeriu the grace of beauty in all aspects. Physically, he seemed like an archangel, bearing alternately the fiery sword of the divine word and the lily of purity, full of mystical fragrance. Morally, he was above

* The future Fr. Arsenius, co-struggler of Archimandrite Cleopa Ilie at Slatina Monastery and in the wilderness, and present-day spiritual father of the convent in Techirghiol on the Black Sea.

reproach—his humility uniting with resolute tenacity. Spiritually, he was always transfigured. In his light-bearing words, you could not tell if he was speaking from spiritual insight or if the Spirit was speaking through him."*

This brotherhood, however, did not extend throughout the entire prison. As Alexandru Virgil Ioanid recounted: "Meanwhile, other groups also formed in prison that were mainly preoccupied with politics, and were consequently more worldly. These viewed us with great caution, and they sometimes became hostile towards those who were concentrated—excessively, they said—on the path of Christian perfection. Sometimes the atmosphere became oppressive and bridges between the groups were almost irreparably torn down. Then Valeriu did something that no one else would have ever even considered. On the nameday of Dr. Victor Biris—the leader of the chief opposing group—Valeriu went up to him with his hand extended and wished him many years. He then made a warm appeal for the reestablishment of a spiritual connection between the groups in the spirit of Christian love and understanding. Dr. Biris and the others from his group were amazed by Valeriu's gesture, considering it a reflection of the benevolent attitude of the entire Christian group. For a long period the relations between the groups improved."

In 1944 Valeriu's mother and three sisters were forced to flee Iasi. They settled near the center of Romania, in the town of Fagaras in the Brasov region. At that time Valeriu still had permission to write home fairly often, and in this way he made sure his sisters were receiving a spiritual education. His sisters and their friend Neculai Lopsanschi received official permission to see Valeriu at about this time. They saw him with his two closest friends, Ion Ianolide and Marin Naidim. His sister Eleonora recalls the visit: "When I saw them behind the prison bars I was so moved that I fainted. After I came to and the three of us left, we were standing in front of the prison, and Valeriu called out to

*Virgil Maxim, *Imn Pentru Crucea Purtata* (Gordian Publishers, 1997), p. 180.

Ion Ianolide with Valeriu's sister, Valentina, at Galda in 1946. In the background is the castle in which he and his companions were imprisoned.

me: 'Nora, Nora,' and he began to sing a song he had composed. Film could never capture what the three of us, his three sisters felt, seeing him standing there—so good, honest, handsome, talented, and yet innocently placed behind bars. All of his and father's suffering occurred because they loved their country too much."

4. Galda Colony

In 1946 a Hungarian landowner named Albini requested that a group of political prisoners be sent to his vineyard to care for the grapes. Albini was quite wealthy and willing to pay the prison for the

labor of the inmates. Due to drought and financial need the prison agreed, and sent Valeriu and those in his group.

For over a year Valeriu and his companions lived in a section of an old castle. The entire work party was watched by a single token guard. They were asked for their word of honor that they would not escape. According to Aristide Lefa, "Truly, no one trampled on his given word. They took care of the grape vineyard from the digging in spring to the harvest in fall. In winter, when the grapes were ready, lads from the village would come at night and steal the grapes. The prisoners would be given arms to guard the grapes at night. I think it is the only case in the history of penitentiaries when prisoners received arms for guarding. The question was raised as to whether it was appropriate for the prisoners to eat the grapes. Valeriu was the only prisoner who never tasted the grapes from the vineyard. He ate only when he went to work in the village with the peasants, whom he helped in their various labors."

Thus, they were able to conduct a life not much different than that which one would find in a monastery—in prayer, labor, and a common bond of love in Christ—a witness that is still remembered by the local villagers. They succeeded in obtaining the right to go to church on Sundays in the local village and even formed a choir. They also managed, undetected by the authorities, to go on excursions to some of the local monasteries. In the evenings, after toiling all day in the vineyards, Valeriu would copy texts from the *Philokalia* by the light of a candle or gas lamp. These he would send to various friends and acquaintances who were zealously studying the Christian way of life.

Valeriu treasured this spiritual freedom and the ability even to have contact with his family, which was a great consolation for everyone. As his sister Eleonora recalled, "I was there for the Feast of the Nativity with Mama and my sisters, and we were surrounded by so much sublime love. Elizabeth and I decorated a Christmas tree that Valeriu had brought. We sang Christmas carols composed by Valeriu. We rejoiced and we cried. Then, at Holy Pascha, I was there again with

him and we celebrated the Resurrection in the Galda community. The boys sang, directed by V. Mirza. The choir was divine. In the morning, the priest and the villagers offered us an unforgettable meal in the church courtyard."

Valeriu (standing, at right), his mother Elena (standing beside him) and his three sisters: Eleonora, Valentina, and Elizabeth (left to right). Galda, January 1947.

Yet even in these times, which seemed to be quieter, never were the prisoners relieved of their cross. Valeriu Gafencu's closest friend and co-struggler, Ion Ianolide, recalls that even during these two years, "It was slave labor, and we were hungry and naked. And although we worked in vineyards and vegetable gardens, we were starving because we were not allowed to taste even a little of the fruit or vegetables."

These years were a time of preparation for the future trials that awaited Valeriu. Although subjected to a severe regimen that would surpass even that of the most ascetic monasteries, Valeriu was still spiritually free. No one attempted to stop him from living the Christian life. Marin Naidim, one of Valeriu's closest friends, remembers this time in detail: "He was a hero-martyr. He did not perform just one heroic act of courage in a single moment of time, but upheld a constant heroic bearing. He died little by little every day, always maintaining a Christian stance.

"Valeriu had an enthusiastic nature. He had 'his head in the clouds.' He was not of a practical nature. I never saw him sew with a needle, knit wool, or wash his clothes. He would wear them until they were rags and tatters, but he was always spiritually present and had an awakened conscience. He was a poet by nature. It is said that poets are on the first step of the ladder to perfection. I read that somewhere

(Iovan Ducici*), and it seems true to me. Poets fulfill their destiny by beautifying life and uplifting man. Valeriu even wrote poems. He wrote in blank verse and in classical form. Later, when he was in Targu Ocna prison with tuberculosis, I was in the mines in Baia-Sprie. He found out that I was in the iron mines, and he dedicated a poem to me, which, from one man to another, finally reached me. From it I remember only a few lines:

On my calm forehead, place Thy hand
And call me slowly by name.
Just as Thou didst call Thy friend from the grave,
Please, Jesus, give me a drop of water.

"He had heard that it is dreadfully hot beneath the earth, that one is covered with sweat and always thirsty, and in his compassion he implored God's mercy—he asked for me, his friend, a drop of water....

"When he first entered prison, he was clothed in a green suit of English material. It fit him well, but he did not feel comfortable in such stylish clothes anymore, and sought to get rid of them. We were in the Galda Colony. One day Valeriu met a poor man and returned to the colony without clothes. He had given them away. When I asked him where his clothes were, he answered me with a word from the *Patericon:* 'I sent them on ahead.' That is, he had given them as alms, in order to find them in heaven when he got there. I reproved him, accusing him of lack of discernment, since his family was struggling in want: 'It would have been better to have given them to one of your sisters, so that she could have made herself a jacket.' But he still thought that he had done well, saying that God would take care of them [his family].

"Once, at that time, a Gypsy woman came out onto the road asking for a match. He reached into his pocket and promised to give her all of his change if she would throw away her pack of cigarettes and

* A contemporary Serbian diplomat and poet who died in America several years ago and was reburied in the cathedral he built in Trebinje, Bosnia.

Gafencu with his mother at Galda, 1946–47.

allow him to crush them underfoot. The Gypsy did so and took the money. He knew the Gypsy would buy more cigarettes with the money. Nevertheless, he was pleased that he had tried to stem the tide of evil; that maybe he had given that woman something to ponder regarding smoking—that it is a sin.

"Nature is beautiful, indeed, but you must be endowed with some special antennae in order to perceive the hidden mysteries of creation. Valeriu had this capacity to comprehend the beauty of nature, because Valeriu loved nature, and nature only reveals itself to those who sincerely love.

"When he was in the colony of Galda he would rise early on Sunday and go into the field to gather flowers. He would come back

with his feet wet with dew and his arms full of flowers for the church. He would urge me to do the same. So I also would gather red poppies, but I would feel somewhat embarrassed to go through the village with my arms full of flowers. Not him—it was very natural for him; he did not feel the least bit awkward or ridiculous. He himself was an element of nature. He was part of the picture.

"He was a type of incorrigible dreamer—a kind of Don Quixote. I often heard him reading a paradox from Cervantes: 'Run through prisons after freedom.' The verses referring to the death of Don Quixote are also fitting for him:

And I am dying beside an old candle.
I will hear Sancho weeping, and the priest.
How could he find room for such a great dream
In this frail and weak body of Don Quixote?

"He sang. He often used to hum Schubert's Serenade or different religious hymns: 'By the Waters of Babylon,' 'God Is with Us,' 'Lord of Hosts.' He would improvise his own melodies, and all were in a minor key. I never heard him sing worldly songs; it seemed that he did not take part in this world.

"He had read a lot in his life, but now he only read one book: the Bible, and those related to it—the *Philokalia*, the *Patericon.* (One was still allowed to read in Aiud until 1948.) And he prayed. On a hill in the midst of an alfalfa field there were ruins of an old abandoned church, which Valeriu would frequent. Lacking a roof, the church was exposed to storms and tempests, and it was here that Valeriu prayed.

"When someone would come to the house to see him, Valeriu would always approach him with the question of faith, seeking to convince each person of the importance of the struggle for salvation. He had told me that 'even if we do not succeed in changing the world, at least we have awakened people's interest. Let us make it so that they no

Valeriu Gafencu (right) with his mother and close friend Ion Ianolide in 1946. In the background is the wooden church at Galda, in which Valeriu and his companions would sing on feast days.

longer feel good when they do evil; let us create obstacles; let us put questions before them; let us divert their steps.'

"He made a point of the 'awareness of sin' because there were many who considered only fornication, theft and crime to be sins, Many did not recognize themselves as sinners, either thinking they had no sins or downplaying them as unimportant. Other sins had been lost from their sight, the greatest being, perhaps, the sin of pride. *God resisteth the proud but giveth Grace unto the humble* (James 4:6). The Lord will leave the conceited man to himself. Without Him, the man will realize that he can do nothing and then will cry out to Him.

"From Valeriu I acquired the habit of revealing everything that was

on my soul to my brothers, practicing what can be called 'brotherly confession.' *Confess your sins one to another* (James 5:16). I cultivated myself in this way through the influence of his moral courage.

"Valeriu affirmed that there are two paths to salvation: one—normal and suitable for most—through marriage; the second path—suitable only for the few who are called—through monasticism. At first, he tried the former path. Wanting to marry, he proposed to an old friend in freedom. Being refused, he resorted to the second path: he vowed to become a monk when he was set free. His resolution was enough for God, and God took him to Himself; He no longer had need of further evidence of faith from him."

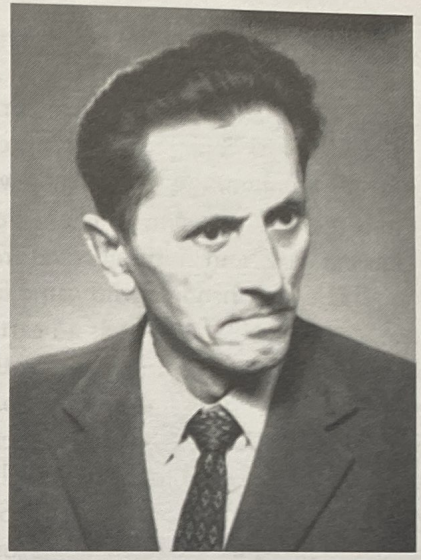
5. Under the Communists

After the Communists took complete control of Romania in 1948, the prisoners were sent to Vacaresti penitentiary. Before the Communist takeover, Vacaresti had been the largest monastery in the Balkans.

At this time Valeriu was offered freedom in exchange for leaving Romania and settling in the now Soviet-dominated Bessarabia. Faced with the choice between "freedom" as a citizen of the Soviet Union and life in prison, he chose the latter.

As time went on the conditions only got worse, as the underlying evil of Communism "in practice" unmasked itself in the form of mental and physical tortures. Marin Naidim describes the gradual diminution of both freedoms and normalcy, and Valeriu's response to it: "Until 1948 we were taken out of the cells into the fresh air for about one hour a day. Step by step, the time was diminished, until it was only ten to fifteen minutes, and there would be consecutive days when we weren't taken out at all. In the courtyard of the prison was a flowerbed, but without any flowers growing in it. Only some grass grew there. No one tended it. In the center was a troitsa—a large carved wooden cross—made by those who preceded us.... The troitsa disappeared one

night; the Communists smashed it to pieces. All that remained—how can I say?—was an orphaned flowerbed, devoid of flowers and the cross. Valeriu returned from a walk around the flowerbed, and brought into the cell a handful of grass in which was a dandelion and some pieces of 'shepherd's bag.' With a radiant face he showed them to me, saying: 'Look what beautiful flowers I've brought you.' He saw beauty where it was not. Or, perhaps, it was there, but we did not see it. He had the eyes to see it."



Marin Naidim, one of Valeriu's closest friends.

In 1949, Valeriu was transferred to Pitesti prison. He had now spent the prime of his youth in prison; his life was nearing the consummation of its sacrifice. At this time there were mass arrests of the Romanian youth, intellectuals, monastics, and anyone considered to be a threat to the new regime. The youth were all being sent to Pitesti, which was to become the site of the diabolical experiment of "re-education." Fr. George Calciu, a survivor of the Pitesti experiment, described it thus: "It was the use of unbelievable means of physical and psychological torture that had been consciously devised to break the youth from their past—their Christian faith, family, love of country, and anything that was good and honorable—in order to recreate the 'new man.' After they were completely broken and had agreed under torture that they would embrace Communism, renounce faith in God, denounce others and give information, they were then forced to go into the cells of their brother prisoners and in turn perform the same methods of tortures as proof of their loyalty to Communism. The

purpose was to destroy the personality of the individual and make him a tool of the state."*

The "re-education" experiment had not begun when Valeriu arrived in Pitesti. The regime was preparing the prisoners by breaking them down physically, so that they would be spiritually unprepared for the coming experiment. Walks were completely suspended, food rations cut back, and clothing taken from the prisoners.

Here the prisoners who came into contact with Valeriu saw him not so much as a man but as an earthly angel. Whereas before he had been a leader and inspirer of the youth, now he poured forth the love of Christ on all. Alexandru Virgil Ioanid recounted: "My first impression was particularly powerful. It seemed to me that he was emanating an unceasing river of love and a brilliant energy. It made me think of the aura around St. Seraphim of Sarov. He was for me, without a doubt, a charismatic personality. However, we did not stay in the same cell, as I would have desired." Among those who knew Valeriu in prison was the twenty-two-year-old George Calciu. Years later, as a priest, Fr. George spoke of the influence of Valeriu Gafencu on the younger prisoners: "It was enough just to see him and pass by him, to immediately feel the influence of Gafencu. We men who were freed from prison were moved many times. So Gafencu might spend time with some four hundred different people as they moved through the cell. The moment they were in the cell with Gafencu, they completely forgot any bad thought, any rebellion against Jesus Christ. A church was established there in the cell. There were young people, rebellions, conflicts, and so on, but he changed their soul and mind. Therefore, his memory is greatly revered, and the people who stayed with him in the same room still pray to him as to a saint."**

Valeriu Gafencu's life became a complete sacrifice, as he gave up his will in all things. Florian Dumitrescu described one typical episode:

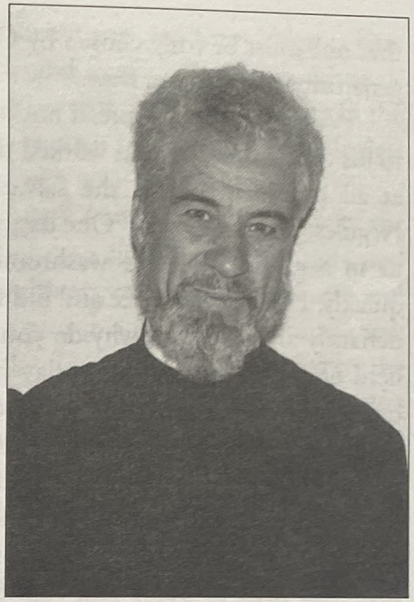
* See Fr. George Calciu, *Christ is Calling You* (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1997), pp. 96, 131–35.

**Ibid., pp. 173.

"Mircea Selten was an amateur comedian and he would amuse himself with a song, which he would hum nearly every day:

'I am the long-hand Apache,
Famous in seven counties . . .'

"I got the impression that this song disturbed Valeriu's prayer of the heart, a hesychast practice which he performed. Having been a college classmate of Mircea's, and understanding his spirit, I asked Valeriu if he wanted me to ask Mircea to sing this song less often. He answered with his usual peace and calm: 'Who has the right to take away Mircea's small pleasure?'"



Fr. George Calciu in 1985.

During his imprisonment at Pitesti, Valeriu contracted tuberculosis. Seven years in prison had overpowered his robust constitution. While many became depressed at the onset of the disease, having no hope for the future, Valeriu continued to inspire those around him. Bucur M. Negulescu recounted: "In that intellectual environment, being young and subject to pessimism because of the tuberculosis, he sowed optimism, trust in the wisdom of God: 'Let us lift up our hearts' and 'We are not alone—God is with us.' He convinced those who admired him to follow him, explaining that the purpose of our earthly life is resurrection. His life was a model that many followed.

"I think now that many saints of our Orthodox Christian Church were isolated in the wilderness and lived in asceticism in service to God. But, in order to be holy in a crowded Communist prison, I think

that one must be truly chosen by God, growing and overflowing with generosity, and bearing fruit."

Valeriu's love was spread not only to his fellow prisoners but also to his tormentors. Valeriu worked to keep the peace in the prison, and at all times strived for the salvation of the guards. As Bucur M. Negulescu remembered: "One day, when the guard Florica was leading us in a group from the washroom, he yelled at us to move more quickly. I lost my patience and did not control myself. I turned to him defiantly and said, 'Sir, why do you cry out like that, as if addressing a herd of cows?!' He wanted to lay hands on me, but we were close to our room, and I quickly entered. He stayed, as usual, at the door. From within I turned to him again and said defiantly, 'Hey, come on in—why don't you come here?' But he did not dare. (The regulations forbade him to enter alone, unarmed, among so many prisoners.) He spitefully locked the door from outside. Then Valeriu reprimanded me. This man of peace and righteousness, who had passed through and seen so much during those seven years of incarceration, said to me: 'Don't you realize that we are in their hands? We must not make them worse, but must strive to make them better!'"

Likewise, Florian Dumitrescu recalled that Valeriu treated all men as being made in the image of God: "One day, Valeriu came up to the most cruel guard, for whom inflicting insults and beatings were a matter of course: 'Mr. Georgescu, one time the high priests came to the Savior, bringing a woman who had fallen into fornication, and they addressed Jesus: "What do we do with this woman, because according to our law she must be killed by stoning?" And the Savior answered: *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.* Those that heard this dispersed one by one. Jesus said: *Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you? … Go and sin no more* (John 8:7–11).'

"After a few hours, Georgescu opened the door of the cell and said: 'They had no grounds; that is why they did not kill her.' From that time on, Georgescu showed a glimmer of humanity and respect toward us in the isolation cell."

All things earthly were slowly being stripped from Valeriu. First his physical freedom, then his health, and finally his self-will. While almost everyone in prison tried to circumvent these losses—even in the smallest way—Valeriu was not in the least troubled. Florian Dumitrescu recounts:

"It was in the month of May, 1949. I awoke in the middle of the night to the sound of unlocking bolts—a sign that always indicated that an event was about to occur. Suddenly, the door was opened, and into the cell came two colonels, two peas in a pod with the same thick fingers and the same enormous necks. They were accompanied by the jailor. It was the usual scenario: the beginning of the inhuman searches of the cells. Traian Popescu, Octavian Voinea, and Mircea Selten entered the cell. Valeriu Gafencu and I had been brought in earlier.

"With hate in their eyes, the colonels addressed us: 'So, you want to escape, do you?'

"Voinea's intervention was categoric: 'It is a falsification of the truth, Mr. Colonel.'

"The encounter was charged with mutual distrust. [One of the the colonels asked:] 'Hey you, what do you want?'

"Then I heard Gafencu answer: 'I want religious assistance, which is guaranteed to us by law.'

"'Hey you, what are you saying? You say you want us to bring you a "popa" [derogative for priest] into the cell?'

"'Yes, I wish for this. It is my right.'

"'This one is a fool!'

"'Yes, I am a fool for Christ.'

"Valeriu was totally at peace within; there was a complete harmony between what he said and what he did.

"When the colonel announced that we were not allowed to possess anything more than a set of underwear and a shirt—neither a jacket nor pants—we found ourselves in a difficult situation. While Valeriu was preparing his packet of clothes to turn over to the storehouse, we were looking for hiding places in order to save our health,

because it was cold in the cell. When we were preparing our packets and no longer under the surveillance of the colonels, Voinea cried out: 'We must defend ourselves from these criminals.' Valeriu replied: 'The Savior teaches us to give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's; therefore, I submit myself to the words of Jesus.' The colonels later maintained that they took these measures in order to prevent an eventual escape, for which the prisoners were preparing."

In December of 1949, Valeriu's health dramatically worsened. His cellmate, Florian Dumitrescu, witnessed his complete collapse, which would spare him from the impending re-education experiment at Pitesti.

"One night Valeriu had a resounding cough and he fainted. When I looked at him, blood was flowing in a stream from his lungs. It was the first time he coughed up blood. Then Voinea knocked on the door and cried out with all of his might: 'Call the doctor.' When the guard opened the door of the cell, we all began to sing 'God is with us....' When he recovered consciousness, Valeriu said: 'Be quiet, brothers, because I want to die in humility, unknown by anyone....'

"A few days later, when he coughed up blood again, he was taken from us and brought to the infirmary."

The regimen for breaking down the prisoners' health in preparation for re-education had worked too well. Alexandru Virgil Ioanid relates: "Knowing that those sick with lung disease would not be able to withstand the tests of 're-education,' they decided to evacuate them from the Pitesti penitentiary and send them to the penitentiary-sanatorium, Targu Ocna. The medical official of the prison drew up a list, and at the end of December, 1949, a group was formed, of which Valeriu Gafencu and I were part. Valeriu was in a serious state. He could barely stand on his feet. While on the road, even though we were also weak, others supported him and carried his baggage. In the police van, with his cheeks a yellowish-brown because of fever, he would talk to us about the blessedness of suffering for Christ. Like the

Targu Ocna prison as it appears today.

martyrs of former times, he said, we must withstand the persecutions unleashed by enemies of the Faith."

6. Re-education at Targu Ocna

The year 1950 marked Valeriu's ninth year of uninterrupted suffering in prison. By this time he was afflicted not only with tuberculosis, but with rheumatism as well. The combination had destroyed his great physical stature.

At this time, Valeriu was described by Aurelian Gutas, one of his fellow prisoners, as "far too thin and not able to stand on his feet by himself. His frame, which at one time must have been lofty and imposing, was now like a broken and leafless tree. Illness and suffering had put a heavy stamp upon his body. The look in his blue eyes, however,

shone serenely, full of kindness. Whoever had the eyes to see could read in them great meaning—love for God and man."

Nonetheless, in retrospect Valeriu's illness could be seen as a providential reprieve from a worse fate: the re-education program about to begin at Pitesti. "We escaped from an earthly hell," wrote Aurelian Gutas, "by which God sternly punished us for our sins. Now, through His mercy, we were heading to a place where the blows would be a little less painful, yet where illness would scourge our bodies without mercy." The death sentence of tuberculosis, combined with malnutrition and cold, damp conditions, was considered a mercy compared to the events taking place in Pitesti.

At Targu Ocna Valeriu was settled into a room with three other men as seriously ill as himself. Two other men stayed with them, nursing them as best they could: feeding and washing them, and attempting to alleviate their pain. The improved diet at Targu Ocna, combined with the little medicine he received, permitted Valeriu's health to improve for a time. Although still not able to get out of bed, he regained enough strength to increase his preaching of the word of God. The prison regulations were quite relaxed compared to those at Pitesti, and many inmates took advantage of the opportunity of coming to his bedside to receive a profitable word. Gutas, one of his cell-mates, recalled this time of spiritual gathering:

"In the long evenings and nights of winter, Valeriu would call us next to him, in order to exchange thoughts about our Christian conscience. On one such evening he asked me the most profound and essential question, something that I kept with me for the rest of my life: 'What do you think is the fundamental purpose of life?' I tried hard to formulate the richest answer in content, but I think I failed to render the core of the truth. Valeriu's answer was: 'I consider the chief aim of our life to be a continual preparation for the day of the Christian resurrection. On that day, men and nations will present themselves before the supreme judgment, with their good deeds and their sins, resulting in their proper placement in the heavenly hierarchies.'

Perhaps I had heard such or similar things, but they had passed over me like water over stones. The way Valeriu expressed them—with a thrilling vibration in his voice and a heavenly depth in his eyes—struck my soul like a bolt of lightning that transformed my inner world for the rest of my life. He practiced the 'prayer of the heart,' a hesychastic practice which he had started years before, so that now the prayer was self-moving without ceasing, to the rhythm of his beating heart.

"The passing of time has strengthened my conviction that I have never met another Christian personality so powerfully developed in both height and depth. His concern for Christian salvation went far beyond himself and even Romania. He was deeply interested in the Christian flowering of Orthodoxy and he thought constantly about the final destiny of man. He would not make reference to the time that had passed or to the time until our deliverance. I realized that he had transcended the normal limits of time and space, and was living in the dimension of eternity."

The first hints of the results of the "re-education" experiment arrived in the form of fifty prisoners from Pitesti, half of whom had passed through the experiment. Upon hearing about the horrors that had taken place, Valeriu was saddened and said, "We also await difficult times."

Those prisoners who were considered "re-educated" made preparations to institute the same system at Targu Ocna. Their first steps were to make contact with the political officer and create a state of tension and unrest among the prisoners.

Thus, the "re-education" began. At first the political officer probed the spiritual state of the prisoners—pressuring and threatening prisoners on the one hand, and on the other making promises of freedom to those who would cooperate. Soon the stakes increased. Blackmail, threats, psychic pressure, isolation, the hardening of the regime, and finally brutal violence were introduced to persuade the prisoners to be indoctrinated. Those who agreed were given permission to

receive letters, packages and medicine, and were given the possibility of freedom.

About this time, according to Ion Popescu, "the political officer approached Valeriu. Valeriu's response to all the offers and threats was to say that he put all his hope in God, had firm faith that his life was under His protection, and that there was no need of any other support. The political officer was aggravated and told him he would have to die and that all who refused to change their attitude toward the regime would, therefore, also have to die in prison."

Among the arrivals from Pitesti was Valeriu's closest friend, Ion Ianolide. When he arrived he was exceedingly ill, but he recovered quickly and was soon nursing Valeriu and other ailing prisoners. Those of like mind in resisting the "re-education" began to gather around them. They relied only on God, praying to Him to deliver them from this trial. According to Alexandru Virgil Ioanid, "even at the cost of excruciating suffering and the sacrifice of their lives, they remained until the end in the position of witnessing the Lord Christ and rejecting Communist atheism."

In the end the attempt at "re-education" in Targu Ocna was a complete failure. "The political officer and those 're-educated' did not acquire even one convert from among them. There were sick men who had packages arrive from home with the saving medicine—streptomycin; and the attempt was made to blackmail them into becoming informers in exchange for receiving their medicine, but they straightway refused. The packages of medicine were sent back to their families, and those who kept their souls pure were destined to lose their earthly lives. I know of three such cases: Eduard Masichevici from Bucovina, George Nitescu, and Emil Sobieschi. Through them and others the prophetic words of the Lord Jesus were confirmed: *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*" (Matt. 16:25–26).

Targu Ocna had become a spiritual sanatorium. A system designed to make men into demons had been used by God to make saints. Valeriu Gafencu was clearly aware of God's mercy and strove to make those around him understand this. A hidden spiritual life was blooming, and there was nothing the authorities could do. Eugene Dimitriu recounted: "For hours on end, in the semi-darkness of the room, Valeriu Gafencu would speak in a whisper to the youth on duty, reminding them of the [moral] collapse at Pitesti: 'God had mercy on us, and He brought us to Targu Ocna in order to perform a miracle of moral regeneration, the regaining of Divine Grace.'

"A Bible was secretly brought into the sanatorium, and was circulated in installments. It was never discovered. The officer had his antennae extended into the prison, and he could not understand the spiritual growth of the 'bandits.' Under the cover of his identity as medic, Dr. Banu would stand at the head of the patient's bed and carry on a highly meaningful discussion. The medics did not hide [their activity] from some of us.

"Valeriu Gafencu asserted that the salvation of the Romanian nation must be carried out by the youth together with the priests. They must disperse the word of God among men and face any danger, even unto the supreme sacrifice [of their life]. Those who were resolute to do this after they were freed from prison, at the height of the Communist terror, were mercilessly assailed and thrown back into prison. The 'Pitesti Experiment' has to be seriously contrasted with the 'Targu Ocna Phenomenon,' where it was proven that men could become saints."

By 1951, Valeriu's condition, which had initially improved in Targu Ocna, was worsening. He had spent over a year in bed without movement. This, combined with his feebleness and insufficient blood circulation, had resulted in large, black, crusty sores on his body. They covered a large section of his back, thighs, and shanks, and there was no way to heal them. According to Aurelian Gutas: "Others who were in a similar state would wail, blaspheme and revolt, because the

Aristide Lefa, photographed by the police on the day he was imprisoned.
He was severely beaten on the previous day, and both eardrums were ruptured.

smarting and pain of the wounds were unbearable. But I never once heard Valeriu complain, although by his appearance one could read intense suffering. Tears of pain would appear in his eyes when his wounds were being dressed with meticulous care and brotherly love for hours at a time by the prisoner doctors Ion Ghitulescu, Nae Floricel, and Aristide Lefa. From strips of torn shirts we would make bandages for covering the sores, but because of the lack of necessary medical substances the strips would stick to the wounds and cause terrible pain when they were taken off. You would not hear any outcry from the mouth of Valeriu, but after a while, beads of sweat would cover the arch of his forehead. The doctors observed that this was the sign that his patience had reached its limit. Then they would stop and leave him alone for a short time to recover."

The number of sick steadily increased. In that atmosphere of disease, cold and malnutrition, even the young and healthy quickly succumbed to tuberculosis. At first, the seriously ill were kept in Room 4. Eventually, because of the increase in terminal patients, a second room was designated for their care. Aristide Lefa, one of the doctors who took care of Valeriu, recalls: "Together with my colleague Mihail Lungeanu, I provided the medical assistance. To the surprise of all, not one of us was infected with lung disease. It was a true miracle. Staying constantly near Valeriu, I was able to have long discussions with him and to get to know him well. And I, like his other companions in suffering, was overcome by his powerful personality and lofty Christian bearing. This he lived without ostentation, greatly influencing the spiritual atmosphere of the whole sanatorium, even though he was permanently confined to his bed.

"In this room hundreds of the sick died—the majority of them young. I stayed in their midst and I saw them dying. Not one of them—absolutely not one—revolted against his lot or against God. They died reconciled, confessing Christ—even Ion Filipescu, an old socialist who had claimed to be atheist. And all of this was due to the spiritual atmosphere that was attributed mostly to Valeriu Gafencu. Room 4, in which each one awaited his end, was a temple of prayer, a temple of the dead. Each one who entered into contact with the dying was aware of the danger that was in store for him, but faith in God gave him the strength to overcome that fear without showing it.

"I remember how, during the night, when Valeriu needed to urinate, he would endure until the orderly on duty was called by others. He would do this so as not to bother the orderly by getting him up from where he was resting, even though it brought about a strong discomfort and even pain. Such spiritual refinement!

"In the summer of 1951, on top of his serious illness, he acquired acute appendicitis. They could not operate at the sanatorium because they lacked the sterile instruments and materials necessary to enter the abdomen. The woman doctor, Dr. Danielescu, despite the difficulty,

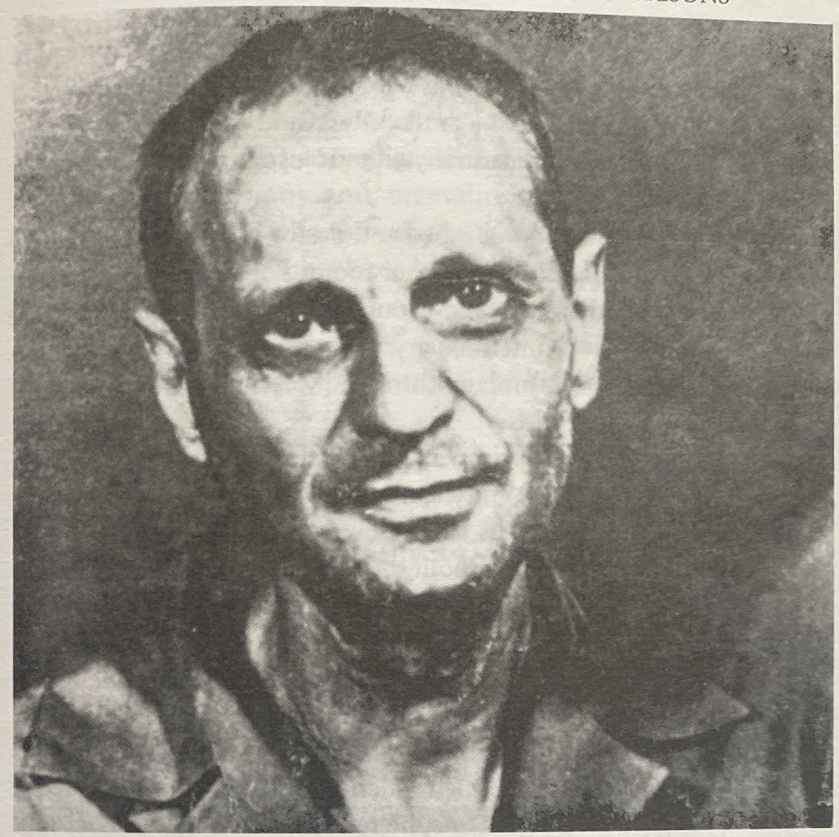
obtained permission to transport him to the hospital in town. There, the surgeon anaesthetized him and performed the operation. The nurse, who was standing at the head of his bed, saw that he was perspiring a lot, but attributed this to his lung ailment. At the end of the operation, with a faint voice, he said to the doctor, 'Doctor, you operated on me while I was awake.' Surprised, the doctor told him to lift up a leg and when he saw that he could do this, he realized that the anesthesia had not completely taken affect. He understood that he had operated on him without enough anesthesia. 'Well, sir, why didn't you tell me? I would have given you local anesthesia and it wouldn't have hurt you. How were you able to endure so much pain?' This incident much affected those present, and the nurse furtively lifted a handkerchief, having tears in her eyes. A short time after the operation Valeriu was stuffed into a kind of cart with two wheels and jolted over the rocky pavement back to the sanatorium. He confessed to me upon his arrival that the road was awful. He advised me never to be operated on because it is inhuman. I laughed and I told him that it was his own fault. He should have brought the fact that he wasn't anaesthetized to the medic's attention."

7. Pastor Richard Wurmbrand

There arrived at Targu Ocna a poor man, admitted under the name Basil Georgescu, who was apparently living out the last days of his life. His body was covered with bone tuberculosis wounds and sores produced by ganglion, which exuded pus continually. By ethnicity he was obviously of Jewish background, but little else was known of him.

The prisoners under the direction of Valeriu saw it as their Christian duty to ease his sufferings. They did everything in their power to help him so that he could end his days in as much spiritual peace and reconciliation as possible.

"Basil" eventually confided to Ion Ianolide, who took care of him, that his name was actually Richard Wurmbrand. He had grown



Richard Wurmbrand at the time of his imprisonment.

up an atheist, embraced Communism, and was strongly implicated in underground Communist activity, having as his conspiratorial name, Basil Georgescu. He had been arrested and condemned for illegal Communist activity during the years 1936 to 1939. After his release, he converted to Christianity and became a Protestant pastor. In 1948 he was again arrested, this time for his work in the underground church.

"Eventually everyone found out," recalled Aurelian Gutas, "but

that did not at all change our brotherly care for a man found in terrible suffering. The difference of religious confessions, of ethnic origins and of past politics, for which so much blood was and is shed, melted into a sincere love—Christian, natural; without ostentation, rhetoric or pomp.

"Valeriu was confined to his bed and Pastor Wurmbrand likewise was confined to bed, at first in another room. For many months they could not see each other, but their thoughts would circulate from one to the other, through our intermediary. The ebb and flow of Christian love enveloped Pastor Wurmbrand through [Valeriu's] unity, in spite of the distance."

Meanwhile, one of the prisoners, Relu Stefan, had received a parcel from his family containing a sufficient amount of streptomycin for the healing of his tuberculosis. His body, however, had already stabilized, and he had regained strength without the need of antibiotics. These antibiotics he gave to Valeriu, happy that he might be able to save his friend's life.

Instead of taking the medicine, Valeriu surprised everyone in the prison. According to Aristide Lefa: "Without saying anything to anyone he decided, in his turn, to give it to Richard Wurmbrand, who was critically ill, though not worse than Valeriu. Despite all our insistence and medically grounded arguments, he refused to change his decision. The result was that Wurmbrand was saved, and Valeriu died." As Aurelian Gutas recalled: "In his exalted love and Christian closeness to Pastor Wurmbrand, Valeriu considered it fitting that this one be saved from the jaws of death before him.

"Deeply impressed by this exalted gesture of unsurpassed dignity, the doctor prisoners respected Valeriu's choice. They assumed the risk of punishment that could follow if the change of destination of the streptomycin should be discovered. They accepted and administered it in great secrecy to the pastor."

Indeed, the dying pastor regained his strength. His first wish was to be taken to the bedside of Valeriu. "Between these two," records

Alexandru Virgil Ioanid, "began an exchange of knowledge and spiritual dialogue, carried on in the spirit of good faith and Christian love, with the intent of drawing near the truth, and not imposing opinion. It was not two chosen personalities that were coming together, but two Christian conceptions and mentalities: the Orthodox and the Protestant.... Those who assisted the two of them in Room 4, where their conversations took place, later told us that most of the time Valeriu was the victorious one, obliging the Protestant pastor to recognize the correctness of his views. Richard Wurmbrand once confessed to Valeriu: 'I would like to enter into the kingdom of Heaven by the same gateway as you.'"

8. Freedom in Prison

Valeriu had now spent ten years, one third of his life, in prison. Much of that time had been spent with his closest friend, Ion Ianolide, who had also been arrested in 1941. Through years of suffering together for Christ, they had developed a oneness of soul that could never be understood by the world.

In the last years of Valeriu's life, the two friends had envisioned and articulated a kind of brotherhood for the laity. It was to be named "Servants of Christ." The principal characteristics would be akin to those of the monastic ranks. Members would live in the world without being "of the world." They would embrace the first two monastic vows of obedience and voluntary poverty. Finally, in place of the vow of chastity taken by monastics, the laymen would take a vow of service. According to Alexandru Virgil Ioanid, Valeriu and Ion had outlined the principal purpose of the brotherhood:

1) An intensified, apostolic activity of spreading the Christian teaching.

2) The focusing, within one's sphere of influence, on a genuine Christian life—being concerned first of all for the *content*, not the *form*.

3) The impressing of a Christian character on all public activities: social, cultural, juridical, medical, economic, etc., through the members of the brotherhood who take part in these professional bodies.

4) The performance of good deeds, the increasing of the independence of the Orthodox Church in relation to the state, and the restoration of all the ecclesiastical assets that were confiscated or destroyed by the Communist regime.

5) The reconsideration of how a "typical Christian" is seen. Christians are seen as men who are meek, compassionate, forgiving, tolerant, submissive, somewhat naïve, and easily deceived by anyone. This partial image should be completed, according to the words of Jesus, with the qualities of boldness in Christ, wisdom, firmness in defending the Faith and, in the particular conditions of our epoch, participation in the historical events through which the will of God is realized.

They envisioned that the brotherhood would be under obedience to the Church, and all activities would be under ecclesiastical direction. Through these activities they hoped to bring about the revitalization of the laity. The end result would be, according to Alexandru Virgil Ioanid, "the training of many more faithful for the good estate and development of the whole Church."

At the time when Valeriu had given his medicine for the healing of Richard Wurmbrand, Ion had been isolated in a room with seven other men. Later, another group of prisoners received the same punishment, and the others were sent back to the section for the sick, receiving a lighter regime. This gave Ion the opportunity to once again nurse the dying Valeriu.

No one in the prison except Ion shared or truly understood the depths of Valeriu's spiritual life. Years later Ion divulged the heights to which Valeriu's prayer had led him. Alexandru Virgil Ioanid received this testimony and related it only after Ion's repose in 1985:

"One morning when, as usual, Ion came to Valeriu's bedside, he found him in an unusually transfigured state. Valeriu related to him

the following: 'Last night, while I was strongly concentrated in prayer, I felt like I went out of myself. It felt like my spirit left my body through my mouth. Then I was raised up above myself and I saw my body lying immobile in bed, and the things below me became smaller and smaller. Perhaps I was taken to heaven, as the Apostle Paul says [cf. II Cor. 12:2]. I felt an indescribable peace and happiness. Later, I reentered myself, again through the mouth. I am now asking for your counsel as to what I should do. Should I ask the Lord to let me continue [to enter] into the same state? Was this brought about by the Holy Spirit? Could it be a temptation in order to make me prideful and to make me believe I was raised to where it is fitting only for those with special Grace?'

"After they had consulted together, they arrived at the conclusion that the best course was to let things happen by themselves, without making any efforts or prayer for this state to be repeated.... According to Ion, Valeriu never again had the same experience until his death, which happened soon after that."

As death neared for Valeriu, a great consolation was given him. The prisoner and priest, Fr. Viorel Todea, arrived in Targu Ocna. Valeriu was once again able to receive the Divine aid of the Sacraments.

9. Repose

The winter of 1951–52 found Valeriu approaching a state of complete physical collapse. His physician, Aristide Lefa, recounted some of his memories of that winter:

"One afternoon ... he had a medical crisis of atrium fibrillation (arrhythmic heartbeat) with all of its consequences. We all consulted and decided to administer a dose of strophanthin with glucose, the only major cardiac tonic that we prescribed. All awaited the outcome, but we did not find any modification of the heart's rhythm, even though the effect of this medicine is usually almost instantaneous.

Closing time had come and I was on duty for the night. We agreed in common to administer another dose after closing, even though none of us believed that he could survive this crisis. He was cyanotic. He kept his eyes closed, with his hand on his little cross, and was probably praying. I was convinced that only a miracle could save him. After administering the second dose, I put my hand on his pulse and there was still no change. After about a half an hour, I was called to another sick person in the next room where I stayed for fifteen to twenty minutes. When I returned and looked at him from across the room, I was convinced that he had died. He was no longer cyanotic, but pallid like he usually was, and I was afraid that the death pallor had set in. I ran over, and when I took his pulse it was beating normally. I could not believe it, but it was the truth. It was a miracle. He opened his eyes and he looked at me with a smile, serenely, as if nothing had happened. I dissolved sugar in water and gave it to him to drink. It was the only way I could help his tired heart. When he drank, he looked at me with that unique look of his intense blue eyes, which flickered. He said to me, 'To Him they gave gall, and to me you give honey?'

"Everybody loved and respected him. Even those in the administration were impressed by this powerful personality. The so-called 're-educated' did not dare to look him in the eye, mainly because they had not done their duty, even though he would look upon and treat them like all the others, with the same Christian love. I had many discussions with him, frequently contradictory. I was in the position of a fighter, with sword in hand. He was living an exalted Christian life and had immense love for his enemies as well as for his neighbors. No sentiment of hate ever entered into his heart. He convinced me that the most powerful weapon in fighting evil is love for one's neighbors, but only after I went through my own experiences in life did I truly learn this. Even so, I never reached the level attained only by those who are called. And Valeriu was one of these.

"Even though he was seriously ill and always confined to bed, he was present in our life—in our joys, but especially in our sorrows. In

him we all found wise counsel in our greatest moments of mental exhaustion in the fight against the evil within and outside ourselves."

In early February, 1952, Valeriu knew that his earthly end was imminent. On February 2, the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord, Valeriu asked Nicolae Ittul to find him a candle and a white shirt. These he said he needed before February 18. He also said that he had a little metal cross, given him once by a girl he knew, which he wanted put into his mouth on the right side. He told Nicolae, "Wash me and clothe me, because on February 18 I am departing from you."

The morning of February 18 dawned. During the medical rounds he thanked both the woman doctor and the Major Sergeant from the bottom of his heart. At approximately 10:00 a.m., Valeriu asked Ittul to summon his closest ones to him so that he could say farewell. In the face of death he expressed no terror, but radiated an angelic serenity.

At noon Valeriu was given a meal, but he refused it. He was preparing to enter the other world in full consciousness up to the last minute. At his bedside Ittul and Lungeanu were praying, while Valeriu was perspiring profusely. Then, between 2:00 and 3:00 p.m. in the midst of fiery prayer, his pure soul ascended.

Aristide Lefa writes: "Thus completed a life which came to an end much too early—a life which was offered not the usual earthly joys, but the suffering that comes from bearing the Cross of Christ. On the other hand, his immeasurable faith was the blessedness of Eden, despite all the hostile conditions in which he lived. Because of him I am convinced, without a doubt, that there is no true happiness on earth except through ascetic effort and prayer to Him Who gave us the possibility of salvation. After his life had ended, the whole sanatorium fell under a profound sadness. Even those who had adopted the position of toeing the line of 're-education' were touched. Many died at Targu Ocna, but they died reconciled with God and their neighbors. Never, however, was everyone as a whole more deeply affected as on this sad day.

"At that time the head of the section was a militia man, Orban Petre, who was evil through and through. He took great sadistic pleasure in making all sorts of trouble for the prisoners. When someone would die, he would lock us all in the room so that we could not say good-bye to the one who had died or put a flower at his head since we did not have candles. But this time, when he found out about the death of Valeriu, he left the section and went out to the front entrance for two whole hours, making it possible for all of us to see him one last time and do the proper things [for the newly reposed]. When he returned, with a meek voice he asked Ion Ianolide, whom he knew had been the closest to Valeriu, if he wanted to take something from his belongings. This had never happened before. Ion replied that he did not need anything; he was grieving too much, having just lost his most beloved brother in suffering.

"When someone died, the body was raised from the section into a box, which served to transport everyone to the grave. There they were thrown, without a coffin, usually into a common grave. Until the burying, the box was set near the exterior wall, where there is a kind of screen. Shortly after Valeriu was taken out of the section, it began to gently snow, with big snowflakes, which soon covered everything with an immaculate layer, just like his pure soul. It was the first and the last time in my life that I had the conviction I was living near a saint."

10. An Afterword

Ion Ianolide, Valeriu Gafencu's closest friend, wrote the following in 1983, two years before he died. In this memoir we hear an echo of Valeriu's spirit and experience:

February 18, 1983.

I am sixty-four years old. From 1941 to 1964, I was imprisoned, tortured and mocked—at first, by the Antonescu dictatorship, and then by the Communist one....

Valeriu's sisters, Eleonora and Valentina, with Eleonora's husband, Mircea Colgiu, in the cemetery at Targu Ocna where the bones of Valeriu Gafencu repose, August 1995. On the back of the cross are verses written by Valeriu.

I have confessed Christ my whole life, and in 1944 I dedicated myself completely to Him. I was always confronted with materialism—be it bourgeois or be it Communist. I measured the Christian Faith against Islam, Buddhism, and Confucianism, and especially against the Talmudic Jewish faith. I compared Orthodoxy with Catholicism, Protestantism and neo-Protestantism. I gave atheism a great fight....

I stayed approximately five years in total isolation, starving and naked. I stayed over fifteen years in common rooms—some smaller, others larger—in which I lived day and night, forced to take care of all bodily necessities in the room in a "tineta," a kind of bucket. Sometimes eight people would be squeezed into a cell six-and-a-half feet square, sleeping two, three or four to a bed. Our bodies and souls were, every moment, rubbing against each other. The terror of the guards, hunger, cold and illness seemed easy to us compared to the terror that is created between men who are different, desperate and often degraded.

I did agricultural work for two years. It was slave labor, and we were hungry and naked. Although we worked in vineyards and vegetable gardens, we were starving because we were not allowed to taste even a little of the fruit or vegetables. I was hungry for over twenty years, often dystrophic because of malnutrition. My body was freezing during all those years in prison. I was beaten, tormented and tortured for years, unto the destruction of physical and spiritual resistance. I have known the awful domain of living beyond bearable limits. For years I was threatened with death. "My soul" was continually asked of me. I often offered my life and I preferred the prospect of death in order to save my soul, my conscience, and my integrity; and only God protected me from falling. There exists no man who can withstand all the tortures. Many years—about fifteen in number—I was terrorized with the prospect of "re-education" in order to "restructure me," and "wash my brain." I refused, not fearing death but fearing that I might break down. Only Divine Providence saved me. I suffered terror from

the jailors, and terror even more ferocious from informers and assassin prisoners, who had sold themselves to the political powers. I knew demonized human beings, with demonic expressions on their faces, who performed demonic acts. I was surrounded in an atmosphere of collective demons, which oscillated between madness and criminality. I took care of men who were dying: some hopeless, some in a state of revolt, others calm. I saw "saints" who radiated light, dying in a heavenly atmosphere. I listened to professors, scholars, literary men, and I learned more than in a university. I knew Communists and Jews in prison, and I also knew those who had been in power. I took care of the general who presided over the military court that condemned me. It was given to me to close his eyes. After he had served the rulers, he too had been flung into prison.

I have known the bourgeois and the Communist, both as a free man and as a prisoner. All of this I filtered through the Spirit of Christ in which I strove all my life to live. At the end of this bitter experience, only Christ remains alive, whole and eternal in me....

Today it is thirty-one years since Valeriu died. I went to church and I went to Confession. On Sunday I will receive Holy Communion. I find holiness built into my being this day, so that nothing can separate me from it. It is the happiest day of my life, even though on this day the most precious man that I have ever known died. It was precisely him, on that day, who transmitted to me the blissful state which has accompanied me my whole life. I was so happy that I desired eternal life more than the spiritual fullness that I felt in him then. I was, and of course Valeriu was too, perfectly lucid, normal, and conscious of all that had happened. He was full of Grace. Christ was present in him and so I could also participate in his blissful state. Spiritual intensity dominated him without reservation. Eternity was visible in the moment. Blessedness sprang forth out of suffering. The atmosphere trembled in unearthly light. My soul was full of peace. My body was light. Under my feet I could feel an energetic field, a kind of vibration which kept me on the earth. I wept from happiness.

A recent commemoration service at the cross in the Targu Ocna cemetery.

I could see in the spirit: I saw the heavens opening in the immeasurable depth of Valeriu's eyes. I felt the Holy Spirit Who worked and spoke through him. In his physical helplessness and exhaustion I felt the Divine Energy of another plane of existence. I think I was in "heaven." I think that I was also near Jesus, because Jesus was present in Valeriu. Valeriu's faith gave me strength. The messianism of the man that had died gave me the wings of confession. Valeriu's love subjugated me entirely to the love of Jesus. I know and feel that Valeriu accompanies me and helps me in applying the methods and means to differentiate between the two "worlds" in which we live and which, in the Divine plan, have a perfect unity. My life is Christ's. My thought waits and looks only for the will of God. My aspirations are in the joy of His promises. I am conscious of the messianic nature of the

Christian Faith, and I desire to serve this Faith completely until death. I love people and, for their salvation, I follow the way of the Cross. I love life but only in the perspective of eternity; that is why I perfer to die than to allow the degradation of the soul and the conscience. I know I find myself in a battle against gigantic forces that can crush me, and I ask for wisdom, strength and protection from God.

Although I am physically ill, and although my nerves are hypersensitive, my mind is whole and my reasoning is lucid. I have voluntarily withdrawn from the world because men from the world spurn me or attack me and I cannot defend myself in any other way from them. I cannot serve except through prayer, love, meditation and witness. I serve in order to keep my soul intact. I desire to have a Christian end. I am aware that I have gathered divinely and humanly significant experiences, and that is why I am obliged to leave an inheritance. I am not being vainglorious and affirming my ego, but only Christ. I live alone, isolated, silent. I see the spiritual, political, economic and military disaster that the world is in, and I do not think it can be averted. The world will suffer from the consequences of the errors of its orientation until it will open its mind to receive the truths of God and of the Faith. That is why the Faith must have authentic confessors. I want to do my full duty. I know that the world is contained in the Divine plan of salvation. I believe. I love. I hope. Today, just like thirty-one years ago, I feel close to Valeriu and, along with him, close to the Lord Jesus.

COMMUNIQUE OF THE HOLY SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Regarding New Destruction of Orthodox Churches in Kosovo and Metohija

November 19, 2002

DURING the night between Saturday and Sunday, November 16 and 17, 2002, the Serbian Orthodox Church experienced in Kosovo and Metohija new destruction of its holy churches. Namely, Albanian terrorists, with the senseless desire to erase all traces of the presence of the Serbs in this region, planted explosives and seriously damaged the Orthodox Cathedral of Serbian Saints in Djurakovac, and levelled to the ground the Church of St. Basil of Ostrog in the village of Ljubovo near Istok. Since June of 1999, when the war ended—or, more precisely, since the arrival of the United Nations Administration and KFOR* peacekeeping forces to Kosovo and Metohija, so that they could, in accordance with Resolution 1244, assist in overcoming the consequences of war and enable the creation of a multiethnic society—according to information available to us 110 Orthodox churches and monasteries have been destroyed and demolished (according to some this number is actually 138), without one of the perpetrators of these crimes being discovered and being held accountable.

The Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church is deeply saddened by this latest barbaric act of Albanian terrorists, and even more deeply disappointed in the international community which

* Kosovo Force.

All that remains of the Church of St. Basil of Ostrog in the village of Ljubovo.

enables under its administration and rule at the beginnining of the third Christian millennium the merciless destruction of monuments of spirituality and culture of one people in the very heart of Europe. At the same time, the Holy Synod of Bishops is disappointed by the fact that the attempt of the Diocese of Raska and Prizren during the summer to begin with the symbolic restoration of one destroyed monastery (Zociste) in Kosovo and Metohija failed to gain support and understanding among representatives of UNMIK* and KFOR.

For all these reasons the Holy Synod appeals to the international community to stop discriminating against the Serb people in Kosovo and Metohija, to offer adequate protection for all historical, religious and cultural monuments regardless of to which people and culture they belong, to enable a peaceful and safe life for all citizens, and to enable the return of all expelled persons to their homes. Only in this event can our destroyed churches be restored and further destruction prevented.

Finally, the Holy Synod extends its full support to the Bishop of Raska and Prizren, Artemije, to all clergy and monks, and to the faithful people of Kosovo and Metohija, to endure all the suffering and persecution which they face, having as their consolation Our Lord Christ Who was crucified for us and resurrected, and Who will bring our suffering to an end and bequeath us peace, freedom and peaceful coexistence with all other peoples in Kosovo and Metohija. Amen! God grant that it be so!

* United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

A recent icon of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov.

Letters of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

Translated from The Collected Letters of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov *(in Russian), Moscow, 1995.*
Titles have been supplied by the translator.

Part II, continued from The Orthodox Word *no. 222*

9. On Pride

A letter to his disciple, a hieromonk of the St. Sergius Hermitage.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Having entrusted myself to the help of God and to His strength, made perfect in weakness, I have conceived the intention of replying to your letter likewise in writing. This is more so that my mind might not be distracted during a personal conversation and might not grow faint under the din of words, but might in silence, in the seclusion of my cell, preserve a peaceful state, the only state in which Truth may be perceived. I stand before His face and, illumined by His light, look upon my soul and compare it with what I see in your accusation. And what do I see? I see wounds on my soul; I see its numerous illnesses; I see

infirmities, of which some are from nature, and others are the results of wounds and illnesses, past and present. I look to my past life and see that it is a chain of errors, a chain of falls. At almost every step I have been mocked and defamed by the devil due to my lack of spiritual wisdom, due to my excess of pride, which is disinclined to ask counsel of my neighbor. In such a state is my soul, when the path of my life has already reached the half of my days. Meanwhile, my body has weakened; diverse infirmities pierce and cut me through and through. They are heralds—they proclaim to me the nearness of the parting of the soul from the body. Soon, soon, I will be lying in my bed—not in order to give my tired body temporary respite, but to lay it aside—in the coffin, in the bosom of the earth from which it was taken, until the future General Resurrection. Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom, for my soul is wounded and my body is marked by sin. Because of my state, it would be most fitting for me to leave everything and, away from it all, to give myself over to inconsolable weeping—when all is lost, at least not to lose repentance.

But for the attainment of this condition, which I acknowledge as most fitting for me, I use no means besides my feeble prayer, in which I ask that the will of God be done in me. This prayer is instilled by the fear of asking something that exceeds my strength. This fear is instilled by experience itself: for in all the experiences in which my strength has been tested, my weakness has been revealed. Where the demons have drawn before my mind a picture of brilliant successes, in actual fact there turned out to be loss. Danger arose, and the fatal precipice was covered over with flowers. I recognized the deception after the deception had taken place; I recognized the beguilement, being seduced and injured by it. Now I am afraid to undertake anything particular by my own will, even if I used to consider that thing beneficial to the soul. It is better, say the Holy Fathers, to struggle against mire, that is, against lust and gluttony, than against conceit, haughtiness, pride, and arrogance. For these latter passions are subtle; they steal into the mind imperceptibly and take on the appearance of

healthy and righteous thoughts. They cannot be observed otherwise than by the light of Grace. I stand before the Providence of God in my mind, setting aside for this moment the wisdom of the world and its righteousness. God created me without my desiring it or asking for it—for how could "nothing" have desired or, even more so, have asked for anything? God redeemed me, a fallen and lost one; He Himself was the price of the redemption. Whereas He, clothed in humility, is not recognized as the Redeemer by fleshly minds—who have ceased to marvel at spiritual things, which are akin to them, and have gone in pursuit of perishable things, which are foreign to them—He granted to me, the wretched one, to come to know myself. When my eyes were closed, clay mixed with spittle from His mouth healed them. The Cross of Christ opens the eyes of the mind. The Cross of Christ preserves the health and heals the illnesses of these eyes. The righteousness of Christ does not exist outside of the Cross of Christ. The world and its righteousness shall perish, for they are of the devil. I stand before my Lord and see His Holy Providence, and I marvel at His longsuffering, at how merciful He is towards the errors into which I have fallen due to self-will and conceit. I entrust my soul into the hands of God. What He gives me, I will accept. He knows my strength, for it was He Who gave it to me. If He gives me one talent in conformity with my strength, I will not seek five, so as not to grow faint under their weight, so that the gift which is intended to serve to the good would not serve to my great condemnation. I flee from my sinful falls not to reclusion, not to the desert, but to self-reproach, to confession of my sins, to repentance. My perplexity, my reasoning, and my will I plunge into the abyss of the munificence and Providence of God.

In such a way does my soul appear to me when I look upon it with my mind in the light of the Gospel teaching. I shall now turn to the words of accusation which are in your letter. Nature itself points to the fact that you, looking at the outward aspect of my conduct, have observed far fewer shortcomings than there are in actual fact.

Acknowledging a large debt, I cannot help but acknowledge a small one—which I should have admitted when I did not want to. Thenceforth, it remains for me with tears to beg your forgiveness and your holy prayers for my correction. If, according to the words of St. Isaac [the Syrian], words of justification do not belong to Christian life and are nowhere prescribed in the teachings of Christ; if the Lord Himself, standing before the authorities of the world and establishing the righteousness of the Cross before the face of the universe, did not accord any attention at all to outward righteousness—not a single word, considering it to be dust and corruption—then who, looking into the depths of his heart, and seeing correctly, would dare to stand up against his accuser? This is what he would say to the sword raised threateningly at him: "Strike, for it is not in vain that you have been raised." He would say to misfortunes: "Fall upon me and overwhelm me, for I deserve it." He would say to his body, worn out by sickness and sent into banishment: "Go, for you have sinned." He would say to his brothers: "Pray for me, a foul one, ye angels of God." He would fall at the feet of adulterers and murderers and would say to them: "Pray for me, for you are more righteous than I." And so this is my state, when the eyes of my mind are opened. But when they close, my state becomes incomparably worse—for the wounds naturally remain the same, but to the pains of my heart is added blindness of mind. From blindness comes insensibility, loss of love for one's neighbor, loss of contrition and consoling tears, and the addition of wound to wound and sickness to sickness. In a word, whether I have sight or am blind, my state, most calamitous, is worthy of the tears and lamentation of all who know and love me. Such is my answer to anyone who accuses me, and to you. And if I were to reply otherwise, I would be sinning.

I would have been content with this, had I not been speaking with my spiritual son who, stating these accusations against me, being burdened in heart, is not passing them off as unquestionable truth, but offers them to me for judgment. I therefore consider myself obliged to

continue my discourse. Despite the fact that I am feeble, I must satisfy, according to my strength—borrowing Light from the True Light, the Word of God—the demands of your letter, not so much paying attention to the appearance of the thoughts contained in this letter as revealing, in the light of the teaching of the Gospel, the secret motives of the heart of which these thoughts are the fruit. According to the opinion of the Fathers, those people who demand of their neighbors the complete elimination of shortcomings have a false understanding of this subject. We find this opinion of the Fathers in the Apostles as well. One of them (John the Theologian) says, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us* (I John 1:8). Another (Apostle Paul) says, *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ* (Gal. 6:2). The Scriptures demonstrate, concerning the most exalted and virtuous men, what the defaming of one's neighbor can give birth to. Who is holier than the Apostles? But we read in Acts that between the Apostles Barnabas and Paul a quarrel took place and, after the quarrel, even a parting. Without any doubt this circumstance was related to us by the Scriptures with the aim that we infirm ones be careful not to be carried away by self-styled zeal, but to bear one another's burdens. Thus is the law of Christ fulfilled! Bear my infirmities, and I will try to bear yours, as I have tried until now. Of course, you are not saying that you are without infirmities. My infirmities are heavier for you than they are for me, and yours are more perceptible to me than to you. If burdens had no weight, then bearing them would have no value, and there would have been no reason to make a commandment of it. But the value of the mutual bearing of infirmities is so great that the Scripture says that it includes the fulfillment of the law of Christ, Who took upon Himself the sins of the whole world.

I shall say a few words to you about inconstancy. Inconstancy, or changeability, according to the opinion of the Holy Fathers, is a constant and certain infirmity of man, as long as he is in the land of his exile on earth. Immutability is a property of the future state. Changeability is not only proper to us feeble ones, but even the greatest saints

admitted to it. Endure the inconstancy in me, and I will endure it in you. My inconstancy is perceptible to you, and yours is to me. Let us bear our mutual infirmities and we shall know how easy Christ's yoke is; but if we throw off Christ's yoke, then to what yoke will we submit ourselves? Very well did the holy Elias Ekdikos [the Presbyter] say, "The house of the soul is patience: it lives therein; and its food is humility: it is nourished thereby."* Precisely—thoughts of humility hold the soul in patience. If this is so, then the following must of necessity be correct: nothing leads the soul away from patience like proud thoughts. I have repeatedly told you and many others, to whom it occurred to me to impart soul-profiting knowledge: when I check my state and behavior against the writings of the Holy Fathers, I find that in an ancient monastery I would have to take my place among the beginners. And in the monasticism of today, where the knowledge of the Holy Fathers, and a way of thinking somewhat marked by this knowledge, are so rare, he who instructs his listeners in the teachings of the Fathers is the greatest of rarities. It is under this condition that I am your Superior and have you as spiritual children, in order to teach you the Gospel way of thinking, which is the way of thinking of the Holy Fathers. Verily, verily I say to you: now, when there are no works at all, and spiritual wisdom is extremely rare, the devil hates this wisdom so much that he would like to exterminate it from the face of the earth, so that the Gospel would be left with us only for our condemnation, not for our edification; for we will be judged according to the Gospel, as the Lord Jesus Christ foretold (cf. John 12:40). The devil is ready to strengthen our common sense tenfold and increase our practical knowledge a thousandfold, if only he can rob us of knowledge of the Cross, by which we can stand at the right hand of God. He who attributes knowledge and common sense to himself likens himself to the devil, who wanted to recognize himself as the source of light. He is the source of imaginary light—fleshly wisdom,

* From "Gnomic Anthologies (Part I)" by Elias the Presbyter, text 62.

which does not submit itself to the understanding of God, bears within itself the mark of pride, and contains within itself the condition for all falls into sin. "Have you seen someone who has fallen? Know that he has directed himself," says Abba Dorotheos. This saint said about himself that he would rather sin in some outward thing, having acted according to the counsel of his neighbor, than act according to self-will. And I, with my small experience, in the face of any failure have the consolation that proceeds from the fact that the deed was done or undertaken without self-will.

Therefore, although according to my unworthiness it befits me to attend only to my own personal shortcomings, nevertheless, by my obligations as Superior and spiritual father, I must tell you what appears to my sinful eyes: the passion of pride is warring against you. One's declaration of having practical knowledge and understanding is its justification, which it uses as a cover. Coolness towards me and towards those around me are its fruit. For after disparaging one's neighbor, there follows the drying up of love. And the drying up of love is a sign of the acceptance of demonic thoughts, since the sign of the acceptance of the seeds of Grace is the increase of love for one's neighbor.

The passion of pride acts differently than the passions of lust or anger. These latter two passions act obviously, and their justifications as well as the craftiness of their justifications are more obvious. But pride creeps in unnoticed. It is sown by abilities, ostentation and, above all, by human praise. Although, to all appearances, we do accept praise and do not agree inwardly with those who praise us, the secret mark of praise remains in our mind and heart; when a humiliation occurs it is painful, and the more we have been imbued with praise, the more painful it is. It is by this very thing that the existence of the mark and the secret dwelling of pride are demonstrated. Woe unto us! The most Grace-filled gifts have been the cause of pride and its fruits—falls! The chief signs of pride are cooling towards one's neighbor and the cessation of confession. Therefore, by whatever doors one has left, let him enter, as St. John Climacus said. Set a rule for yourself

to confess your thoughts, if only twice a week, and as the soul conforms itself to the body, then by the bowing down of your body express humility. Say and repeat to your mind about the brothers: "These are Christ's sheep; these are angels of God," and extirpate arrogance towards them, which is pride. Then, I hope in God's mercy, that peace and love will enter your heart, that by their Grace-filled action they will show you that you are in temptation, that they will open your eyes and you will come to know your true delusion. This incident will enter into the treasury of your soul's experiences, and will give caution to you in future times, and will give direction to the brothers. For an untried man is unskilled but, having been tried, *he is able to succor them that are tempted* (Heb. 2:18), as the Scripture says. May the Lord vouchsafe you to follow this instruction of St. John Climacus: "When once we have entered the arena of piety and obedience, we must no longer judge our good manager in any way at all, even though perhaps we may see in him some slight failings, since he is only human. Otherwise, by sitting in judgment we shall get no profit from our subjection. It is absolutely indispensable for those of us who wish to retain undoubting faith in our superiors to write their good deeds indelibly in our hearts and constantly remember them, so that when the demons sow among us lack of faith in them, we may be able to silence them by what is preserved in our memory. For the more faith flourishes in the heart, the more alacrity the body has in service. But he who has stumbled in distrust has already fallen."*

Not infrequently, pride grows from the instruction of one's neighbors, as a tare grows from a grain of wheat. Therefore St. Mark the Ascetic said, "When one man helps another man by word or deed, let them both understand in this the Grace of God."** *For we preach not ourselves,* says St. Paul, *but Christ Jesus the Lord* (II Cor. 4:5). In the person who cultivates these feelings, passionate attachment to people will

* St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1978), step 4:6–7, p. 22.

** From "On the Spiritual Law" by St. Mark the Ascetic, text 74.

be uprooted, and love in Christ will reign in him, and he will see God's image in everyone. When the mind is carried away by the consolation of this love, then a man will see himself as a kind of vessel filled with stench and vileness, and he will be amazed at how the rays of Divine teaching pass through it and heal a human soul.

It is fitting for me to recall here the words of St. John Climacus, repeated by St. Nilus of Sora: "Some have become stuck in the swamp, but have warned others against a similar fall, and for saving the others, the Lord granted salvation to them as well." For after grievous wounds I have come to know that the signs of pride are disparaging or disdaining one's neighbors and carelessness over confession. But in and of itself, pride is not noticeable to a man, being the subtlest passion, which deceived a light-bearing angel and caused the Fall in Heaven. Upon this passion the others are supported, like a building upon a foundation that is hidden beneath the earth. Finally, I order you to keep this letter secret until my repose. I entrust you and myself to the mercy and Grace of God, which is mighty—if we ourselves do not spurn it—to grant us salvation, although we are totally unworthy of it. Amen.

November 25, 1842
St. Sergius Hermitage

10. On the Struggle with Thoughts

From a letter to a certain monk overtaken by sorrowful circumstances (no date).

Be borne upon the wings of faith across the dark, deep abyss of sorrows that has suddenly opened up before us! Do not test the waves with the mistrustful steps of human deliberation, but go forth across them boldly with the manly steps of faith—and the soft, watery waves will turn under your feet into firm marble or granite slabs. Timidity and doubt at the sight of the sea of woes, at the sight of the powerful

wind, do not become you. This is especially true since He Who has summoned you to walk across the sea of woes, Who has set you apart from the rest of your brothers for such a passage, is the Lord Himself. This call is, at the same time, a blessed election! Christ seals "His own" with the seal of sufferings! He has found your soul to be suitable for Himself, and has therefore stamped it with His seal! The small flock, Christ's portion, stands apart from the multitude of the rest of the people. Those who are Christ's bear in their hands the sign of their election by Christ—the cup of Christ—and upon their shoulders the banner—the Cross of Christ. The sons of the world have turned far, far away from them! In a numberless throng, with a clamor, with a strange thrill, they chase after temporal cares and delights. Time, in their eyes, has been transformed into eternity! They lead a sorrowless life, prosper in that which is corruptible, are forgotten by God, and do not incite the devil against themselves: they are pleasing to the devil—they are his portion. The cup of Christ opens access to the realm of spiritual understanding, to a spiritual state. He who has entered and partaken of the table of spiritual consolation is made dead to the world, insensible to temporal sorrows and deprivations, and begins to accomplish his earthly pilgrimage as if borne through the air above it all—upon the wings of faith. The fetters of reason draw us to the earth—the land of torment. Being on the earth, we involuntarily subject ourselves to torments: *He that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow* (Eccles. 1:18) says the Scripture. Faith lifts one off the earth, frees him from fetters, delivers him from the midst of torments, lifts him up to heaven, and leads him into spiritual rest. They who have entered into that rest repose in coolness, in delight, on the magnificently arrayed, precious couches of Divine vision.

Receive these lines as being uttered out of heartfelt concern. This concern was instilled in me at our first meeting by your soul, which bears in its depths a kind of special pledge, a mysterious, God-loving pledge—a pledge of pleasing God. Receive these lines from the land of sufferings, where I took up my residence so long ago. It was not

pleasing to God that I should tread the common, ordinary path! He set me upon a separate path, in an altogether unique realm. Rarely do I meet a fellow traveler moving along this path, who has visited this realm, with whom I might be able to exchange a word in the language of that land, which has become somewhat familiar to me—it has a consoling sound to the ears of my soul. In its sounds I hear something close and familiar.

What, incidentally, takes place in this marvelous land? There is an irreconcilable war there, an unceasing fight, bloody battles between the Israelites and foreign peoples. Among the aliens that rise up against the Israelites are giants, the sons of Anak—sorrows that lead us to fear, to debility, to despair. The spy of Israel—the mind—informs the soul and its powers about them: *We saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight* (Num. 13:33). *We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we* (Num. 13:31). Exactly! Reflections based on the usual course of events, and thoughts strictly and solely human, bring forth *an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel* (Num. 13:32). But a true Israelite, faithful to God, is led by faith in God; he is fully armed. *I shall pursue mine enemies and I shall overtake them, and I shall not turn back until they fail. I shall greatly afflict them, and they shall not be able to stand; they shall fall under my feet* (Ps. 17:38–39). *And I will grind them fine as dust before the face of the wind; I will trample them down as mud in the streets* (Ps. 17:43). In this war, the mind—hoping in itself, in its own power, in the amount and loftiness of its own knowledge—endeavors to set many and subtle thoughts in opposition to the gathered swarm of aliens. These thoughts are unacceptable. *The sons of Ephraim,* proclaims the Prophet, *bend and shoot with bows turned back in the day of battle* (Ps. 77:12). Human thoughts will not hold out against the thick horde of aliens! They [the aliens] will wear them down and defeat them in argument; they will produce sedition in the mind and confusion in the thoughts. Then the victory will be on their side!

To guarantee success in unseen warfare against the princes of the air, against the spirits of wickedness, against the dark rulers of the world, one must take up the arms which are given through faith, by the foolishness of the preaching of Christ (cf. I Cor. 1:21). *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men* (I Cor. 1:25). Faith's paths and teachings seem strange and terrible to the carnal mind. But no sooner does a man see in experience, with the inner sense of the soul, the might of faith, than he immediately and joyfully gives himself over to its guidance, as to an unexpectedly found, priceless instructor. Then, with disdain, he pushes aside human wisdom, which is rejected by God.

Here are the weapons that the holy foolishness of the preaching of Christ entrusts to Christ's servant for the fight against the sons of Anak—against the dark thoughts and feelings of sorrow that appear to the soul in the form of frightful giants, ready to eradicate and devour it:

1. "Glory be to God for all things."

2. "O Lord! I give myself over unto Thy holy will! Let Thy will be done in me."

3. "O Lord! I thank Thee for all that Thou art pleased to send unto me."

4. "I am receiving the due reward of my deeds. Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom."

These short sayings, borrowed, as you can see, from Scripture, were used by the monastic saints with outstanding success against thoughts of sorrow. The Fathers would in no way enter into debate with thoughts that appeared. As soon as an alien presented itself to them, they would wield these marvelous weapons—right in his face, right in the alien's jaw! It was because of this that they were so powerful and trampled on all their enemies, being made breastplates of faith—and, by means of faith, breastplates of Grace, mighty hands of Grace—and they performed supernatural feats.

At the appearance of a sorrowful thought or of sadness in the heart, begin with all your soul, with all your strength, to utter one of

the aforementioned suggestions. Pronounce it quietly to yourself only, unhurriedly, not becoming excited, with attention. Utter it until the alien has completely withdrawn, until your heart has revealed to you the presence of God's Grace-filled aid. This appears to the soul as a taste of consoling, sweet peace—peace in the Lord—and is not from any other cause. After a while the alien will again begin to approach you, but take up your weapon again and, as the brilliant military leader Caesar commanded his troops, aim right at the enemy's face. To no other part of the body are blows so heavy, so unbearable, as to the face. Do not be surprised at the strangeness, the seeming insignificance of the weapons of David! Use them in battle and you will see a sign! These weapons—a staff and a stone—do the job better than all the profound opinions and research of the theologian-theorists, speakers of the letter of the law, of Germany, Spain, England, and America together! The use of these weapons in battle will gradually lead you from the path of reason to the path of faith. By this path they will lead you to the unbounded, wondrous land of the spiritual. There, the food is hidden manna (cf. Apoc. 2:17). According to the testimony of Scripture, Christ allows only victors therein. You have been brought into the unseen war in order to have the opportunity to be made a victor, and, in virtue of being a victor, to inherit the spiritual treasure. All this is given to you by Christ, Who has loved you, and Who has clearly set you apart among "His own."

And so, as you now gaze from the shore at the dark, deep sea of sorrows—into the distance, where the blue of the water merges with the blue of the sky, into that boundless distance which intimidates faith, listening to the angry murmur of the waves and their monotonous and unfeeling crashing—do not give yourself over to despair; do not allow the sea of sad thoughts into your soul. There are far greater perils here! It is far easier to drown in this sea than in the sea of outward sorrows. Rejoice! And again I say, rejoice! You are on the shore of the sea of sorrows in order to sail across it to the land of joy. The expanse of the sea has an opposite shore, although it is invisible to the

eyes of human reason. This shore is the noetic paradise, filled with spiritual delights. Those who have reached this blessed shore forget, in transports of delight, all the sorrows endured by them on the sea. Step with untrembling foot into the light boat of faith and be borne, as if on wings, across the watery swells! Sooner than you suppose, sooner than you can imagine, you will be borne across the sea, borne into Paradise. But between the spiritual paradise and the carnal, natural, ordinary life that all people in general live, there is set a demarcation—a broad sea, as it were—the Cross and Crucifixion. There is no other path to Paradise! He whom God wishes to lead into Paradise, He first directs to the path that leads there—to the Cross. "A sign of being chosen by God," said one holy ascetical writer, "is when unceasing sorrows are sent upon a man." Let us endure mortification to the world through sorrows, so as to be made capable of receiving within ourselves an essential quickening unto God through the clear, fully tangible action of the Spirit. Let us sacrifice the corruptible for the Spirit! Give yourself over completely to God! Cast yourself into the salvific abyss of faith, as if into the sea—from a cliff!

Do not worry about people—they are the instruments of Providence! These instruments are blind, and of themselves have no power at all, no movement whatsoever. *Thou couldest have no power at all against Me,* said the Lord to Pilate, *except it were given thee from above* (John 19:11)—although Pilate, led by human judgment, declared and affirmed (and, without any doubt, all who were led by such judgment were in agreement with him!) that he had power to crucify the Prisoner standing before him, and power to release Him. Do not take pains over any dealings with people, over any justifications before them! Such dealings and justifications only destroy peace of heart—they bring no benefit at all. Feeble people—flowers that appear for a short time on the surface of the earth! You imagine much about yourselves; you attribute much to yourselves—but you are feeble people! You are respected, with absolute power, but at the same time you do not cease to be instruments—blind instruments, nothing but instruments! And

you do not even see, do not even know that you are instruments! You are despotic, but you cannot help but receive the reward for your deeds! But in the endlessly wise judgments of God these despots are agents without the slightest authority, with no independence at all. *Jesus of Nazareth,* says the holy Apostle Peter to the Jews, *being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain* (Acts 2:23). *I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled* (Acts 3:17–18). In the works of God's Providence, people are blind instruments. It was for this reason that the Lord did not vouchsafe an answer to people who were, to all appearances, invested with total power! It was for this reason that He called the cup—prepared by malefactors, by demons both fleshless and bodily—the cup given Him by the Father.

Receive these lines as the echo of a soul in sympathy with you, who co-suffers with you in your sorrows and earnestly wishes you consolation from God.

II. Consolation in the Midst of Trials

A Letter to Abbot Hilary of the St. Nicholas-Ugresh Monastery.

Your Reverence!
Beloved in the Lord Abbot Hilary!

I received your letter of October 2, and I felt sincerely sorry for you—the more so, since you are drinking the cup I would have had to imbibe, had the Providence of God not diverted me from the Ugresh Monastery. But you yourself know that no matter where you live on earth you have to endure trials. To all appearances it is men that are tempting us, but without the nod of Him Who provides for us, they could not even touch us. And so, in our afflictions let us give ourselves over to the will of our Creator, considering ourselves worthy of trials, and we shall be at rest.

The way out of trials is not a change of place, but the giving of oneself over to the will of God, self-reproach, and (as a result of these) patience. When we are greatly despondent over temptations and murmur about them, we are in imminent danger of becoming fighters against God, as one of the Holy Fathers said, since we are clearly arming ourselves against the will of the Providence of God, Who permits us to be tempted for our great benefit and healing. Forgive me, Batiushka! I am speaking to you as to myself—for I grieve exceedingly often, being drawn along and captivated by my lusts and passions. Having conceived, I bring forth the sins of complaint, faintheartedness, and anger (cf. James 1:15). Then, I only find rest when I give myself over entirely to the will of God. But when I forget not only to glorify the Lord for all His benefits towards me but also to give myself over to His all-holy will and Providence—then the storm again rises up, and my soul is again in danger of drowning in the waves of faintheartedness and fear. If you are in sorrow, your path is not far from the path of those God-pleasers who, proceeding amidst many sorrows and with bloodied feet, reached the City of the Heavenly Jerusalem. There, the sighs of the sorrowing are not heard, but the voice of the unceasing rejoicing of the heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven, who have inherited it through many afflictions.

Let us set aside, let us set aside, Batiushka, the desire for premature rest on earth, so as to receive it at the right time, that is, after death. Let us prepare our heart to accept affliction as from the hand of God, with thanksgiving and doxology. Keep enduring at your post as Superior, as long as it is possible....

If you see that in fact it is impossible for you to remain Superior of the Ugresh Monastery, then the gates of the St. Sergius Hermitage are open to you and Fr. Peter—if the Lord endures my sins and I am still the Superior at St. Sergius. But better is my advice to continue to endure as long as possible, and thus, by the restoration and ordering of the monastery, justify your selection [as Superior]. By my scant experience I know what it's like to restore ruined monasteries. Even here in

St. Sergius, in the first year I laid out a thousand [rubles] from my own money-box for the monastery. For the last two years I have hardly taken anything at all from the money-box, but sink it all into the monastery. And with all that, no matter where you look, things are rotting and falling apart everywhere.

Forgive me, most beloved Batiushka; labor away and reply to this letter of mine as to what you have decided to do. Asking your holy prayers, I have the honor to be your most obedient servant.

October 6, 1837

12. On Monasticism

From a letter to Bishop Leonid of Dimitrov.

... May the Lord save you for your love for monasticism. Many now make complaints against it, seeing, or looking for, various shortcomings in it. But monasticism is a barometer, which, standing in an isolated room, locked in on all sides, indicates with accuracy the condition of the weather outside. Old buildings must be repaired with great caution and knowledge of the work; otherwise the repair might turn into destruction. May the will of God be done!...

January 10, 1867

13. On Sickness, Thoughts, Humility, Patience, and Gratitude

From a letter to N. D., a nun (no date).

Narrow and sorrowful is the path that leads to the Kingdom of Heaven. Among its sorrows are sicknesses, by which the body and soul are cleansed from sinful corruption. He who gazes upon the Cross of Christ is consoled in his pains by the pains of the Redeemer. He who,

looking upon his own sins, has considered himself worthy of everlasting torment, rejoices when illnesses befall him in this life....

What can I tell you, N. D.? You must not be surprised at the multitude of thoughts which are troubling you, from which various painful feelings arise in your soul. Learn humility.

Where? In the Gospel. From whom? From the thief, from the publican, from the sinful woman. Consider yourself to be blind, leprous, and utterly in need of help from the Lord. You will feel tranquility and consolation in sufferings when from a broken and humbled heart, from the depths of your pain, you call out in prayer to the Lord. Then He will come invisibly and help you. If our life on earth has its end, after which those who have spent it in occupations for the sake of God inherit eternal consolation, then you must thank the Lord God, Who has brought you to His holy monastery, where His Holy Name is glorified, where His servants abide in various afflictions, far from all worldly merriment, in hope of eternal consolation, which they will receive without fail if they abide in faith, humility and patience, which I sincerely wish for you. If your heart has no thankfulness, then force yourself to thankfulness; repose will enter your soul along with it. Do not imitate those who, being in the desert for the sake of God and for the sake of the hope of inheriting the promised land, have desired to return to Egypt, and for this have been spurned by God. Death is close, its hour unknown. The judgment of Christ is waiting—let sinners repent; the torment is prepared, and the flame of Gehenna thirsts for its victims! Direct your gaze thereto, for those who often recall Gehenna can escape it. Monks and nuns! Let us give thanks to God, Who has chosen us for His service, despite the fact that we are the offscouring of the world. *Ye see your calling, brethren* (I Cor. 1:26)! God has chosen the lowborn, the feeble, the foolish! Our brothers the lay folk were great and exalted in name and riches and wisdom, but the Lord did not take pleasure in them (cf. Ps. 151:5)!

Blind and senseless N.! Give thanks to God, Who has been

gracious unto you! Trample down and humble the rebellious impulses of your proud heart! And the peace of God, which flows forth from humility, will pour into it. May the merciful Lord strengthen you and help you, according to His ineffable mercy.

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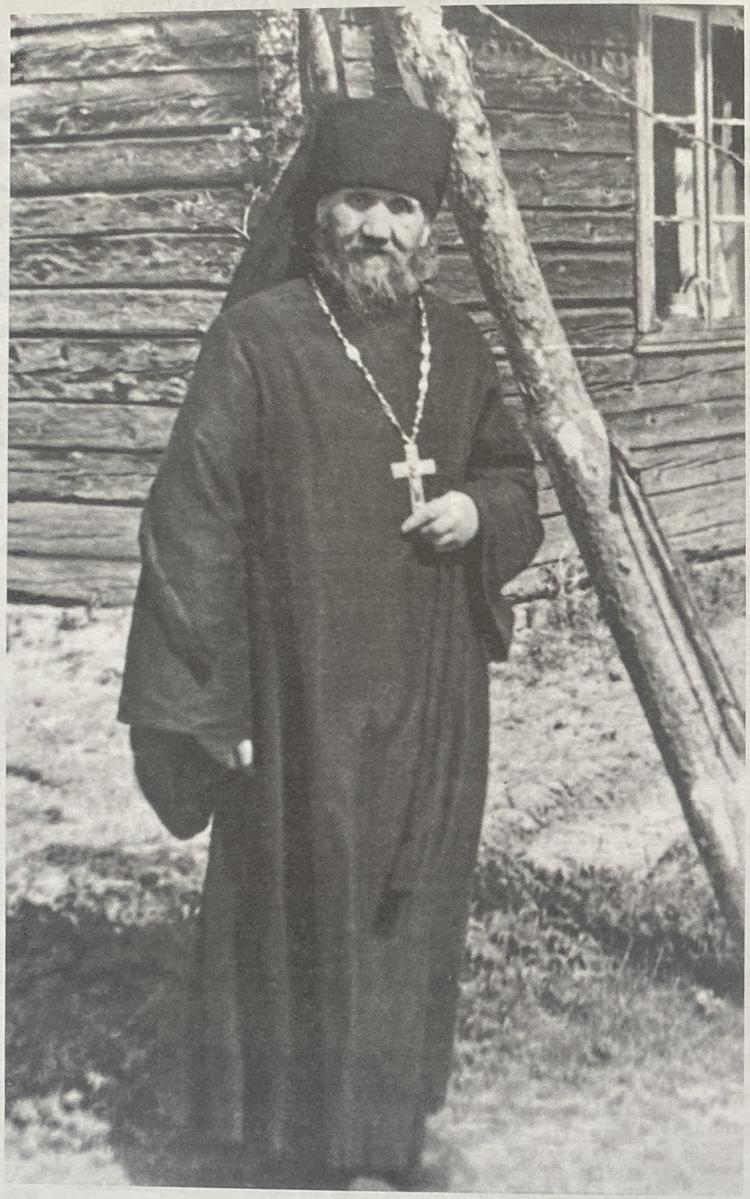


Archimandrite Cyril (Smirnov), in schema Cosmas.

Schema-archimandrite Cosmas of Valaam and Latvia

(†1968) *Commemorated June 15*

By Archimandrite Victor (Mamontov)

Part II (Conclusion), continued from last issue

10. The Elder's Cell

Fr. Cyril* lived in a small house by the pine forest, in a modest little cell.** He gave the large cell to the ailing Fr. Sergei Vinogradov, who had suffered in the concentration camps and who was now living in the Transfiguration Hermitage in retirement.

In the cell was an icon corner with a small iconostasis built by Batiushka himself, before which burned seven lampadas. On the walls were a great many icons of various sizes, mostly paper ones. Near the iconostasis stood an analogion, made from a plywood mailbox. By the window there was a small homemade table on which there lay books and the Elder's notes. A chair stood there as well. On the left was a small stove, almost unnoticeable, and a trestle-bed made from two boards knocked together; there his body rested. On it was a rough black blanket, under which there was nothing. Over the bed hung a

* Fr. Cyril was later given the name Cosmas when he was tonsured into the Great Schema.—Ed.

** Near the Transfiguration Hermitage in the environs of Riga, Latvia. See last issue.—Ed.

large photograph of a Valaam Monastery scene, beside which were photographs of Elder Silouan of Mount Athos and of the Valaam Elders who were living in retirement in the Pskov Caves Monastery.* With these latter he kept in constant contact, either personally or through his messengers. There was also a piece of paper inscribed with the virtues, "Humility, patience, and obedience," which the Elder considered the most important ones for him in the spiritual life.

Fr. Cyril's cell was called the chapel of All Saints, and Batiushka himself called it the "second altar." "I have a second altar here," he would say to the people who came to see him. "I want my saints to have a look at you."

The light always burned there until two o'clock in the morning. He slept little, as he had done on Valaam. He would read the Psalter standing, holding on to the analogion and shifting from one aching foot to the other.

He had a novice who lived in the world with his family, Ivan Andreyevich Kalinichenko. Ivan once spent the night in the Elder's cell and decided that he would not go to sleep until the Elder finished his prayer rule. He struggled with sleep until three o'clock and then fell asleep. Early in the morning the Elder woke him and said gently, "Ivan Andreyevich, let's go to services."

Whenever there were any unpleasant occurrences, attacks of the enemy, Fr. Cyril would go into reclusion. He would lock himself in his cell, receive no one, and would not come out until everything had calmed down. Sometimes the nuns would look in the window in great agitation, to see whether he was alive, since he had not been seen for a long time.

Fr. Cyril had no possessions—his whole treasure was within him. Everything he received he immediately gave away, and therefore it was impossible to steal from him. Thieves, who more than once broke into

*At that time several inhabitants of Old Valaam were living in the Pskov Caves Monastery, such as Elders Michael, Boris, and Luke.

his cell, always went away dissatisfied. Those who washed his linens would see patches on top of patches.

Fr. Cyril was also a faster and ate meagerly. There would be an abundance on the table for others—he loved to treat others—while he himself only gave the appearance that he was eating. On Wednesdays and Fridays he would abstain from food until three o'clock in the afternoon. He never ate white bread. If a crumb of food would fall onto the table during a meal, he would pick it up, kiss it, and eat it.

Fr. Cyril received from the Valaam elders the spirit of simplicity, meekness and humility. In a letter to his spiritual children he called himself a "desert-dweller" who lived with his bee-keeping sisters in his beloved hermitage, where they "labored, prayed, and battled with sins."

The assistant of Metropolitan Benjamin (Fedchenkov), who directed the Riga diocese from 1947 to 1950, related that Fr. Cyril once came from the hermitage to Riga to see Vladika, but did not find him there. She suggested that he wait, gave him a book to read, and went to prepare lunch. Later, when the hierarch returned, she fed him and had lunch herself, then washed the dishes and went to her room to take a short rest. There she bumped into Fr. Cyril, who was sitting quietly. "Batiushka, forgive me for God's sake, I forgot about you." "That's all right, that's all right; I'm fine here with my prayer rope. I finished the book." During the entire, rather long period that he waited, not once did he come out and ask whether the Bishop had come. He just waited patiently.

It is said that one of the senior desert-dwelling sisters once raised her hand against the Elder, but he never said anything about it to anyone; he never complained. Mother Evgenia, a senior sister in charge of church services, a very severe woman who often placed obstacles in his way, once said to him sharply, "You're like a hireling here—but I'm the eldress." "I am a priest," Fr. Cyril humbly replied. For the sake of peace he unmurmuringly left to be with Metropolitan Benjamin at the latter's summer home in Dubulti, and served with him for a time in a small church, as if in a skete.

No one ever saw him in a state of anger or irritation. "If you humble yourself," he said to one of the nuns, "there won't be any offences."

Not long before Fr. Cyril's death, Abbess Tabitha wanted to send him to the Pskov Caves Monastery in retirement and take one of the Riga priests as his replacement. "He's a monk; let him live in a monastery," she said. Fr. Cyril was grieved, but did not complain to anyone. He told everything to the Mother of God: "Mother of God, where is such an old and sick man like me going to go?" On the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, the Lord took the Riga priest to Himself and Fr. Cyril remained in the hermitage.

11. The Nuns and the Collective Farm

At the request of the authorities the desert-dwelling nuns went to work at the collective farm and improved it. "We have no one to work," said those who invited them. "The young people are in school, and only one or two old women are digging in the field." The sisters worked at the collective farm from eight in the morning until five in the evening. Fr. Cyril and the senior sister, Mother Evgenia, would accompany them, blessing the departing vehicle, and would later meet them.

Everyone liked the nuns' work. "When you are the first ones to start planting in the hot-beds," said the president, "everything grows well and properly for us. When we're the first ones to start planting, we have a lot of weeds and everything does not go well." He greatly loved and respected the sisters, and always asked them to come and work.

The collective farm workers took care of the nuns: they brought them to work and took them home; they brought food to the field and gave them their threshing machine so they could thresh the convent's grain; they ploughed the convent's field and did for them everything that the nuns themselves did not have the strength for. A surprising relationship of mutual assistance formed. The workers began coming to the monastic services. "We lived as one family," recalled the sisters. "We lived peaceably. They helped us and we helped

The nuns of the Transfiguration Hermitage. Seated at center is Archbishop Alexei (Konoplev). Fr. Cyril is at his right and Abbess Margarita (Krysko) is at his left.

them. There were no reproaches, such as, 'I'm a worker, but you're just a monastic.'"

For the sisters, work at the collective farm was not a superficial charitable service, but a service of love, and therefore it brought forth the fruit of openness and mutual love.

When the authorities wanted to close the hermitage, the collective farm workers rose to the defense of the convent. "The nuns help us well. Don't touch them." The persecutors retreated.

12. Pastor of the Hidden Church

For the sake of service to his neighbor and the strengthening of the Church, Fr. Cyril frequently left his little hermitage and fearlessly went off to the enormous desert of life, where there awaited him monks and persecuted Christians thirsting for spiritual contact, who

were dispersed among cities and villages in secret monasteries and sketes. Under the conditions of persecution of the Faith, he did his missionary work secretly; as far as the watchful authorities were concerned, these were trips for the gathering of funds for the poor hermitage, ravaged by the war.

Fr. Cyril never forced anything upon anyone—the people themselves asked him to come to see them, and he would set out with joy on journeys both near and far. If he was unable to reach distant locations himself, he would send his assistants there. The most important factor in these trips was the Christianization of people, helping them enter into the life of the Church, and helping them to create living communities. Fr. Cyril did missionary work in a variety of environments: he spoke with individual people, families, and communities in Elgava, Riga, Belopolya, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Penza. During the period of persecution there were many Christian communities that had neither pastor nor church. Some had been broken by lack of freedom, while others lived, not like frightened individual Christians, but like spiritual families, continually gathering in their homes for lay services. Such a community, consisting of thirty people, existed in the Tver province, in the village of Zharki. Many times the community had addressed the local authorities with the request to be registered and given a pastor, but without result. The residents of Zharki, having a thirst for the Eucharist and for spiritual guidance, began in 1958 to come to the elderly priest Fr. John Zhuravsky (1867–1964) in Riga for help, but when he became physically weak and could no longer serve or receive people, he gave his spiritual children over to Fr. Cyril, who was one in spirit with him. "Someone has to carry you on further," Fr. John told them, "and soon I'll be gone." The people of Zharki began to go to the hermitage—sometimes the whole community, and sometimes one at a time—and they began to assist the hermitage. They would send flour and wax, "God's bread," as Fr. Cyril called it. This community of experienced Christians now has a pastor, as well as a church that they themselves built.

Thanks to the Elder's ministry the parishes in the provinces came to life and grew in size, and the leaven of common life appeared in them. A spiritual bond to the hermitage and its Elder was formed. It was supported by the letters which Fr. Cyril wrote to all who were close to his heart.

The Elder pitied those who were afraid to have their children baptized in church. He had an assistant who made inquiries about such people. Fr. Cyril would say to him, "Tell them that there is a batiushka who will come himself and baptize without asking for money." After the Vespers service he would go from home to home, painstakingly concealing his trips from the nuns. Once in the summer, returning after baptisms, he felt so unwell that he was unable to get out of the car. The novice Ivan Andreyevich had to carry him in his arms through the woods to his cell.

People would ask the Elder to bless homes and apartments. Even [Communist] Party members invited him, and they would later become attached to him and secretly come to the hermitage for confession or a talk. In one family everyone began to fall ill. They summoned Fr. Cyril and his prayers helped.

In his relations with believers, unbelievers, and people with doubts about the Faith, Fr. Cyril never pressured or forced them. He was moved solely by love, which is the most important thing in missionary work. His relations with people were free, in the Spirit, and full of life.

He never dragged anyone to Christ, but only witnessed about Him by his life. Fr. Cyril was not skilled in giving sermons and rarely gave them. With the radiance of Grace within him there was no need for words. "He knew how to explain a great deal to a person without words," writes Fr. George Blazma, "in a way that few were able to do with words. He was distinguished from other clergymen by the fact that he never taught. This was surprising in light of his life's experience, in light of his monastic life."

Every part of him preached: his soul, his body, and his spirit. *Let*

Fr. Cyril (at center) serving in the Hermitage.

your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16). In his small, bright gray, fading eyes everyone saw goodness and the brightness of everlasting life. "I never saw that gaze to be indifferent or apathetic," recalls Fr. George. "Fr. Cyril looked at each person very attentively, with a feeling of deep respect and interest. This was a gaze upwards from below—not only in the literal sense, but also in the figurative sense."

Fr. Cyril's quickness, lightness, and agility showed his constant readiness to serve his neighbor. His ailing legs, injured by the cold in the camps and tired by many years of standing at prayer, reminded one of his *podvigs* of suffering and prayer. Peace exuded from Fr. Cyril. "His calmness astonished me," wrote Fr. Sergei Bogustov, who had seen the Elder when he was twelve years old. "When he blessed me," recalled

The Holy Gates of the Transfiguration Hermitage.

M. A. Kuznetsova, "I felt (and it was always like this when he gave blessings) that peace and warmth exuded from him."

13. The Testimony of Contemporaries

"I concelebrated with him on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord," writes Fr. Seraphim Shenrok, "and we went to the well to celebrate the Great Blessing of the Water. I felt then that the Elder was close to God. How calm my soul felt when I prayed with him!" "When Fr. Cyril would come to church, you would shed tears," recalls a desert dweller, Mother Anastasia.

Archimandrite John (Krestyankin)* recalls the following: "Before the evening service I entered the altar of the St. Michael Church, made

* Elder of the Pskov Caves Monastery.

a prostration, and venerated the altar table. I did not immediately turn my attention to a guest: a humble elder, standing at the right side of the high place by the window. Our gazes met, and at that instant I sensed the inward state of our guest, who had been praying in the altar. A vivid feeling of humility and profound love, of a light which warms the soul inwardly, was transmitted to me at a distance. I went towards him, and to the degree that the distance between us decreased, the intensity of this feeling increased. We greeted one another in brotherly fashion and I became acquainted with the Superior of the Riga Hermitage, Fr. Cyril. Our short conversation only confirmed that which had been conveyed to me sensibly over a distance at the first moment of our meeting. The Elder radiated an inward light, the light of the immeasurable purity of Christ's love. Quiet, meek, and humble like a novice, he was a true alumnus of Valaam Monastery, and a bearer of the many gifts received by him in that holy monastery. Not having a long-standing spiritual relationship with Fr. Cosmas, in one instant and at first glance I saw in him a true brother of the Elders of Valaam Monastery that were living with us—one in spirit with them. This was that kind of radiance for which no words were needed—the radiance of Grace."

Everyone felt that he could trust Fr. Cyril and open up to him, that the Elder could understand every person and hear him out with real respect and true compassion. At times he did not even give advice, but by his attention revealed to the one with whom he was speaking the great mystery of the latter's importance, his inner freedom. "Fr. Cyril regarded my priestly rank with far greater respect than I myself did," said Fr. George Blazma.

Being listened to so solicitously would always uplift a man; he would come to a recognition of his own worth and responsibility and would see the path of healing from his infirmities, both spiritual and physical.

When he had become an elder, Fr. Cyril preserved in himself the feeling of being a novice. This would always manifest itself in him as

reverent and selfless service to his neighbor. He would meet a person and immediately begin to serve him.

"One of the principal features of Fr. Cyril," recalled Fr. George Blazma, "was his constant and exceptionally active aim for the good. He unceasingly sought and found opportunities to help people in some way, to make things pleasant for them. It was from this that his gaze had a perpetual attentiveness: 'What does a person need? What can I do for him?'"

Once Batiushka was distressed when when he learned that some Gypsies had appeared unexpectedly and made their way into his cell in his absence. The sisters had ejected them with indignation, but when they told the Elder about it, he calmly asked them, "But did you feed them? Did you give them some milk to drink?"

When leaving the church, he would always give alms to all the poor that stood on the porch, blessing each of them, gazing attentively into their faces and speaking with them. When returning from church he would immediately pour seed into the bird-feeder and set food out for the cat. Then he would devote his attention to the guests. He was always exultant whenever he met someone. He never let anyone leave without feeding him, and would ask his assistant, Mother Amvrosia, to cook up *pirozhki,* which he would call "podorozhnichki."* He would always check to see who was spending the night where, and if he saw that someone was in need of something, he would find and bring a blanket or a pillow. If one of the sisters or pilgrims were to fall ill, he would visit that person without fail and bring something. He would bring the shepherd-sisters in the pasture some kind of "consolation" or treats and would bring rakes to the field.

Late in the evening Batiushka would put on an apron and place bread, sugar, tea, and fruit in it, and would go to the cells to strengthen the sisters who were workers but were given meager monastic fare: five tiny potatoes, a cucumber, and bread. He would knock with his staff

*A made-up term, indicating "something for the road."—Trans.

on the window or door and give the sister something from the apron: "This is for you—fortify yourself."

Being a deeply believing man, he understood that his life depended not on any human being, but only on God. God is love. He never wishes anyone ill, and therefore the Elder tried to valiantly oppose all temptations in life without confusion or bitterness. He was always able to say to his persecutors and oppressors, "I'm not afraid of you—I love you." The words of the Apostle, *Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not* (Rom. 12:14), were his life. To Nun Valeria he would say, "Fight for God's righteousness to the point of blood."

14. A New Wave of Persecutions

Made wise through his courage and endurance during the persecutions of the Church in the 1920s and 30s, Fr. Cyril now suffered the new wave of persecutions against Christians which began in 1960. In Latvia, as in Russia, they began to close churches. The magnificent Cathedral of the Nativity of Christ in Riga was closed and turned into a planetarium in 1961, without any opposition on the part of the ruling hierarch. Bishops from other dioceses began to serve the Riga diocese in turn, among whom was the current Patriarch of Russia, Alexei II. Only after three and a half years was a permanent archpastor assigned to the Riga diocese: Bishop Nikon (Fominchev).

The Riga Convent was also under the threat of closure. The younger nuns who were fit for work were ordered to find jobs, while the older ones were sent to the hermitage. Abbess Tabitha, in order to save the Riga Convent, decided to close the hermitage. Fr. Cyril resolutely opposed this humanly devised plan. He stood in defense of God's righteousness with firmness and meek independence. He and the sisters, his spiritual family, prayed fervently. The Transfiguration Hermitage and the Riga Convent were both preserved.

Astonishingly meek and humble, always living according to his conscience, Fr. Cyril never deviated from the truth or engaged in

man-pleasing. Thus he once did not allow a sacrilege against the Sacrament of Confession by a priest from Riga whom he loved: "My family and I were once living in great need," related Fr. Seraphim Shenrok, "and at one point, in a state of despair I decided: 'I'll go to the Archimandrite for Confession,' but inwardly I was thinking something else: 'He'll give me some money for the road, which at the present moment could give me some serious support.' I arrived, and everyone there knew me and let me through to the Archimandrite's cell. I knocked. 'Who's there?' 'Fr. Seraphim to see you, Fr. Archimandrite.' 'I'm not receiving.' I was amazed. He was always so nice to me, so loving, as if I were one of his chosen ones. He knew where I had come from, that I wasn't his next door neighbor. He didn't receive me. I went back with a feeling of unbelievable emotional agitation, and even thought, 'There's an elder for you!' Only when I was already home did I come to myself and rejoice at what had taken place: the Elder, a clairvoyant man, had not allowed me to commit the sin of sacrilege against the Sacrament of Confession."

Once representatives of the authorities came to the hermitage. Fr. Cyril, in dirty clothing, was building something. With irritation they asked him, "Where is Fr. Cyril? We need to have a word with him." Batiushka replied, "He'll be right here," and he went off to change clothes. He called someone to give the guests some fresh milk. After their talk with Fr. Cyril the guests calmed down and left the convent, amazed at his peace-loving nature.

Fr. Cyril had no fear before the heterodox, because he was deeply Orthodox, a son of the universal Orthodox Church. Hence he had a free openness with those of a different experience of Christian life and an ability to find points of unity in a cordial way.

There was a nurse who continually came to the hermitage from Riga, Claudia Schtessinger, an Orthodox woman. Her husband, Ivan Yurievich, was a Lutheran, and this was a cause of discord between them. When he became acquainted with Fr. Cyril, Ivan Yurievich came to love the Elder and Orthodox services. Fr. Cyril spoke with him for a

Fr. Cyril with Ivan Yurievich Schtessinger.

long time on more than one occasion, but did not pressure him at all. He revealed to Ivan Yurievich the mystery of the undivided Church, and the latter wished to accept Orthodoxy. The night after he was joined to the Church he had a dream. There was a very high wall, impossible to climb over. Someone said to him "All the same, you'll climb over it." And he did.

Schemanun Xenia from Moscow related that when Fr. Cyril prayed for the soldiers killed during World War I who were buried at the hermitage, he once had a doubt: "Is it perhaps not pleasing to Thee, O Lord, that I pray for them?" "I knelt," recalled the Elder, "and suddenly the heavens were opened, and over each of the German and Russian soldiers' graves I saw a crown. 'They are my martyrs,' said the Lord. 'They did not perish of their own will.' And I doubled and tripled my prayers for them."

15. Grace-filled Gifts

Fr. Cyril was endowed not only with the gift of eldership but also with other gifts of the Spirit: healing, clairvoyance, and counsel. All of these gifts aided the Elder to serve his neighbor as well and as much as possible.

Mother Theophania lay in the Elgava hospital after surgery and felt very poorly. She was unable to eat anything. Fr. Cyril came to see her and brought all kinds of food: "I didn't know your last name, but I

found you just the same." She said that she couldn't eat anything. "Take everything and eat it," said Batiushka, and he blessed her and left. Mother Theophania began to eat, gradually ate everything, and recovered. When the doctors signed her out of the hospital they asked her to check in with them, but she felt so well that she even forgot about it.

Nun Ludmilla of the Pyukhtitsa Convent in Estonia was very sick and had to be dragged to church. She came to the hermitage accompanied by two people to see Fr. Cyril. At the moment of their arrival he had been conversing with a woman from St. Petersburg who was leaving for home. He blessed her and she went off to catch the train. When the woman was already far away, Fr. Cyril said loudly and with authority: "Mother Ludmilla! She forgot a suitcase. Take it to her." Ludmilla grabbed the suitcase and began taking it to the woman. "Do you think you're going to catch up with her like that? Run!" Batiushka ordered. Mother Ludmilla suddenly took off and caught up with the woman. She returned, and Batiushka was smiling.

Here is what one person recalls: "After an operation my right foot began to hurt and I could not walk to shovel snow in the hermitage. Sometimes I would somehow make it to church, and sometimes I wouldn't. One evening Fr. Cyril's steward, Mother Amvrosia, brought money from him and a note: 'Solomonia, go to the store and buy sugar and preserves.' I thought, 'Why has Batiushka written to me? I won't make it.' I didn't dare tell Matushka that I wasn't going. I gradually made it to the holy gates of the hermitage, although it was hard for me even to straighten myself up. When I stepped beyond the holy gates the pain in my foot ceased. I didn't feel it, and walked to the store. No one found out about this; only my soul knew what had happened by the prayers of Fr. Cyril."

Fr. Cyril's close spiritual friend from the world, the novice I. A. Kalinichenko, recalls: "Once after services Fr. Cyril gave me a prosphoron. At the end of the week he sent me a letter: 'Ivan Andreyevich, you're keeping your prosphora carelessly.' I immediately ran to the kitchen, where I kept prosphora. It was damp there, and the

Nuns Barbara (left) and Veronica Vasilenko.

prosphora had begun to mold." The same man also said, "Whenever there was a serious argument in our family, Fr. Cyril would come for a few minutes."

Once when he was at the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, Fr. Cyril visited Schemanuns Alexandra and Margarita, frequent visitors to the hermitage. The mother of Hieromonk Bessarion, who knew the Elder well, was staying with them. The mother, Nun Valeria in monasticism, was upset that she lived next to the Lavra without a residence permit, and she asked Fr. Cyril to pray. Batiushka said to her, "St. Sergius will soon register you." Three months later, having fallen ill with athsma, she reposed in someone's home right by the monastery. And so she was "registered."

A mother and daughter, Barbara and Veronica Vasilenko, returned to the hermitage from the Gornensky Convent in Jerusalem. They wanted to go back to Jerusalem, but Fr. Cyril would not bless them. "They'll kill you there," the Elder told them frankly. They did not obey him and left in 1965. Batiushka grieved. Many years later his prediction came true. The whole world learned of the tragedy that occurred in the Gornensky Convent.* Obvious clairvoyance!

Fr. Cyril told Nun Evgenia not long before her repose, "We'll go home together." She died on June 6, and he on June 15.

* Both nuns were brutally stabbed to death in their cell on May 19, 1983.—Ed.

"When we drove up to the Superior's house," recalls Protopresbyter Boris Stark, "we were told that Batiushka was resting and we should not trouble him, but at that moment the door opened and he himself appeared, with open arms: 'Well, finally Fr. Boris has come. I've been waiting for you for a long time.' I was amazed at these words, since the Elder had not been notified of our arrival and, in general, I didn't even think he knew of our existence. Then we had a talk, as if we were old friends, and he struck me by his simplicity and at the same time by his clairvoyance. It seemed as though he knew of all the circumstances of my life. Only later, after his death, did I grasp the fact that he had said much about my future. I recalled all of his words, spoken as if by chance."

R. A. Masko (a nurse) relates: "Once Abbess Magdalena (Krysko) and I came to the hermitage, and on that very day I lost my wages (140 rubles). I didn't mention this fact in any way, but went ahead and looked after the sick. Fr. Cyril had a cold and I applied cupping-glasses, prescribed medication, put him to bed, said goodbye, and left. When we were sitting in the car and I had not yet even started the engine, I suddenly saw Fr. Cyril's cell-attendant Mother Amvrosia running to the car. She handed me an envelope with money: 'Batiushka is giving you this money so that you won't grieve.' I was so shocked, I didn't know what to do. I tried to return the envelope, but the Abbess convinced me that I should take it, since Fr. Cyril was clairvoyant. She told me that she had had a similar incident. She had lost some money and Batiushka, not knowing about the loss, had given her money in a white kerchief—precisely the amount she had lost."

S. N. Shelgunova testifies: "I lived in the hermitage with Mother Theodora. She had broken her hip and I was taking care of her, and would bring her to church in a cart. She didn't have an undershirt, and neither did I. I thought I would buy some cotton chintz and sew two of them. Towards evening Fr. Cyril brought Mother Amvrosia some calico, and she asked me to sew some undershirts. Fr. Cyril already knew my thoughts."

The Elder seated a certain Athanasius at table with him for lunch. Athanasius had served with him in the Ordynka Monastery. They were served soup. Athanasius had the thought, "This is good fish soup. If it were whitened with some sour cream it would be even tastier." Batiushka walked out and brought in a liter jar of sour cream: "Well, let's whiten it." Athanasius couldn't even sit at the table out of shame. "Batiushka, forgive me for having such a thought."

One woman from Riga was bringing many things for the sisters of the hermitage. She was riding on the last bus and missed her stop, and so she had to walk two and a half miles. She was greatly afraid. Suddenly she heard the sound of a sleigh. The nuns on the sleigh turned the horse around and asked, "Are you going to see Fr. Cyril?"

"Yes."

"Have a seat. He sent us for you; he's been waiting for you."

When they arrived, Fr. Cyril met them and said, "I've been waiting for you for a long time."

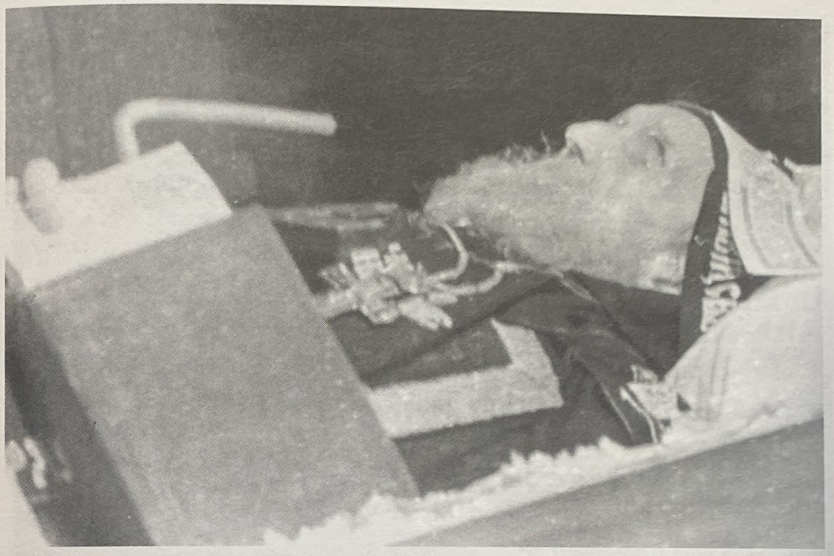
16. The Light of the Other World

There was a day when Fr. Cyril constructed some rakes and, giving them to the sisters, said, "Take care of them. I've made my last rakes."

The time had come for him to leave earthly life which, for Batiushka, had been a life of suffering—illnesses, wanderings, and revilement—which, for those souls specially chosen by God, is a witness to the eternal blessedness granted them.

He suffered until his last breath. Though he was always ill, not long before his death Fr. Cyril fell excruciatingly sick. At the insistence of his relatives he was placed in the Elgava hospital with an attack of angina pectoris. Then at home he suffered a strangulated hernia.

Archbishop Leonid (Polyakov), together with an assisting physician from Riga, performed surgery on Fr. Cyril in the superior's building of the hermitage. The Elder was very patient and refused injections



Elder Cosmas in his coffin.

and medication. They did not use stitches but, in view of the hopeless condition of the patient, they used tape. It reminded the dying man of the Savior's wound on Golgotha, of His sufferings, which always caused the Elder deep feeling, and with which he identified in the sufferings of his entire life and these last minutes.

The people who were in the hermitage suffered with the Elder and prayed for him—those in the churches of the Transfiguration and St. John Climacus, where the priests had opened the Royal Doors, as well as those who were in the hermitage courtyard.

Soon after the operation Vladika Leonid, together with the Moscow priest Fr. Nicholas, who was serving in the hermitage at that time, performed the service of Holy Unction over the Elder, releasing him from his earthly bonds and labors.

On June 13, Archbishop Leonid tonsured Fr. Cyril into the Great

Schema, giving him his name in the world, Cosmas. Batiushka received Holy Communion every day.

Friday came, a day he loved. In the church they began to serve the Eucharist, at which they commemorated the ailing Schema-archimandrite Cosmas. The name seemed unusual to those who were used to the Elder's former name. Before Communion was served, the entire altar shone with light. This was seen by the priest, and by the nuns who were standing close to the altar and singing.

Fr. Nicholas opened the Royal Doors and said to everyone, "I'm going to commune Fr. Cosmas." But right then he returned to the altar, set the chalice on the Holy Table, and asked the altar-attendant, Mother Nectaria, to go and find out how Batiushka was. She came back and said that he had already reposed.

The light had announced his repose. Heaven had communed him. This was June 15, 1968.

At the Elder's burial, which took place on Monday, the same light shone from his coffin and cross, which were being carefully carried to the grave by his beloved spiritual children. A photograph that has been preserved shows this wonderfully. The funeral felt like a great feast; the sun danced as on Pascha.

"When the coffin with the remains of the righteous one was lifted up," recalls Fr. Alexander Kulikov, "many felt that something spiritually great was being lifted up. It's hard to express in words."

In his homily before the burial, Archbishop Leonid called upon believers to imitate the Elder's love, meekness and obedience, which he had acquired since childhood; to fully assimilate his spiritual legacy. "Many did not understand him, since they strove more to acquire outward respect, while he, weighed down by years and illnesses, celebrated the Divine Liturgy and prayed 'for each and every one.'"

Patriarch Alexei I wrote in a telegram to the hermitage: "Peace and rest to the soul of the reposed-in-God Schema-archimandrite Cosmas in the abodes of the Heavenly Father. Instead of grief, let there be our earnest prayers for him, together with those of the inhabitants

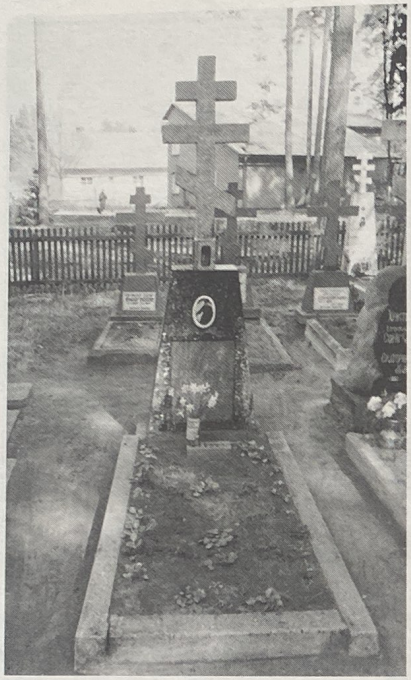
Procession with Elder Cosmas' coffin and cross, showing the light that shone from them.

of the Transfiguration Hermitage, where the reposed Elder served for many years."

Even the workers, though far from the life of the Church, said to those gathered, "That Elder of yours is a saint."

Many taxi drivers came to Batiushka's funeral. After the burial, by some kind of special inspiration, they took those who were gathered there to their homes. When the people wanted to pay for their rides, the drivers refused outright, saying, "Today we're working for free. Batiushka paid for everything long ago." There was a wreath on the Elder's grave from the Elgava taxi depot.

Thus, they *have borne witness of thy charity before the church* (III John 1:6). *He is just, he shall surely live* (Ezekiel 18:9). Fr. Cosmas' love continues to be poured forth and will continue to pour forth on all, for it is alive. In this way he continues his ministry to his neighbor.



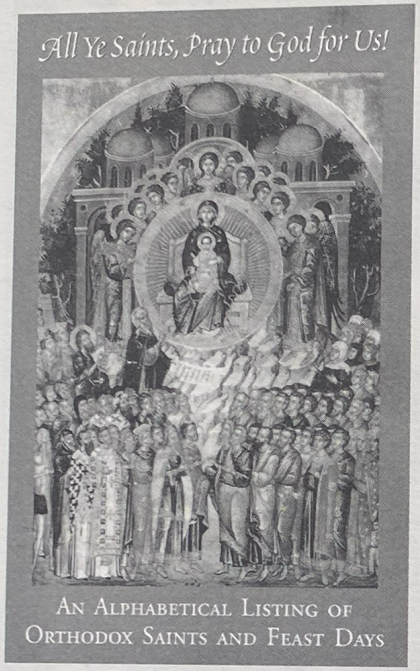
Elder Cosmas' grave in the Transfiguration Hermitage.

Soon after Fr. Cosmas' repose, his spiritual friend, the novice Ivan Andreyevich Kalinichenko, was lying in the resuscitation ward after an automobile accident. His condition became worse and worse. "Suddenly, at night, Fr. Cosmas entered the ward," relates Ivan Andreyevich, "in a black riassa with a cross and a prayer rope. 'Batiushka, aren't you dead? How can this be?' He made a sign for me to be silent. He walked over to me. He touched my leg, which was in traction, with his hand. Whatever place he touched, the pain there would cease completely. It was pleasant. He touched my left leg and walked away from me. With great joy I wanted to enter into conversation with him, but he again made a sign for me to be quiet, and even said, 'Be silent!' He inclined his head and went back towards the door. I was filled with great joy. I thought, 'How can it be? He died, yet he came here alive.' My pain ceased entirely. When the doctor came on his morning rounds, he was amazed. 'You'll manage without the knife,' he said to me. 'At first I wanted to operate on you.'"

I once asked Metropolitan Leonid, who understood and appreciated Fr. Cosmas, "In your opinion, do you think Fr. Cosmas came up to the measure of the Holy Fathers?"

Vladika quietly and firmly said, "Batiushka is a saint, a saint, a saint!"

The photograph attached to the cross over Elder Cosmas' grave.



All Ye Saints, Pray to God for Us!

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—St. Isaac the Syrian

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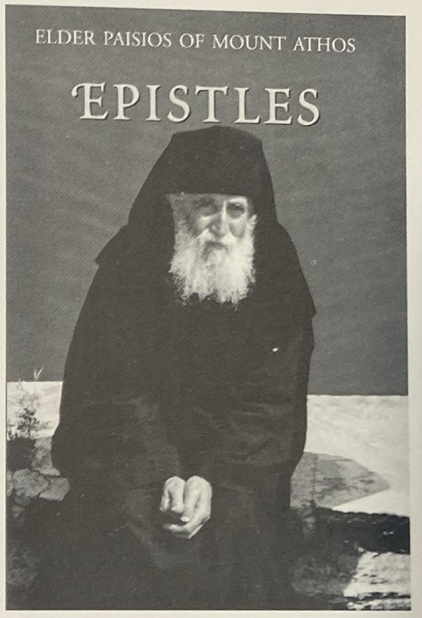
EPISTLES

By Elder Paisios
of Mount Athos



Elder Paisios (1924–1994) was one of the most loved and revered Greek Orthodox Elders of our times. Living as a monk in the ancient monastic republic of Mount Athos, Greece, he lived in the Kingdom of God even while on earth, and received many heavenly visitations. His sanctified soul overflowed with Divine love, and his face radiated Divine Grace.

The Epistles collected in this volume were addressed to the Abbess and sisters of the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti, Thessaloniki, Greece. Although these Epistles were written to monastics, the counsels contained in them can be of inestimable benefit to everyone.

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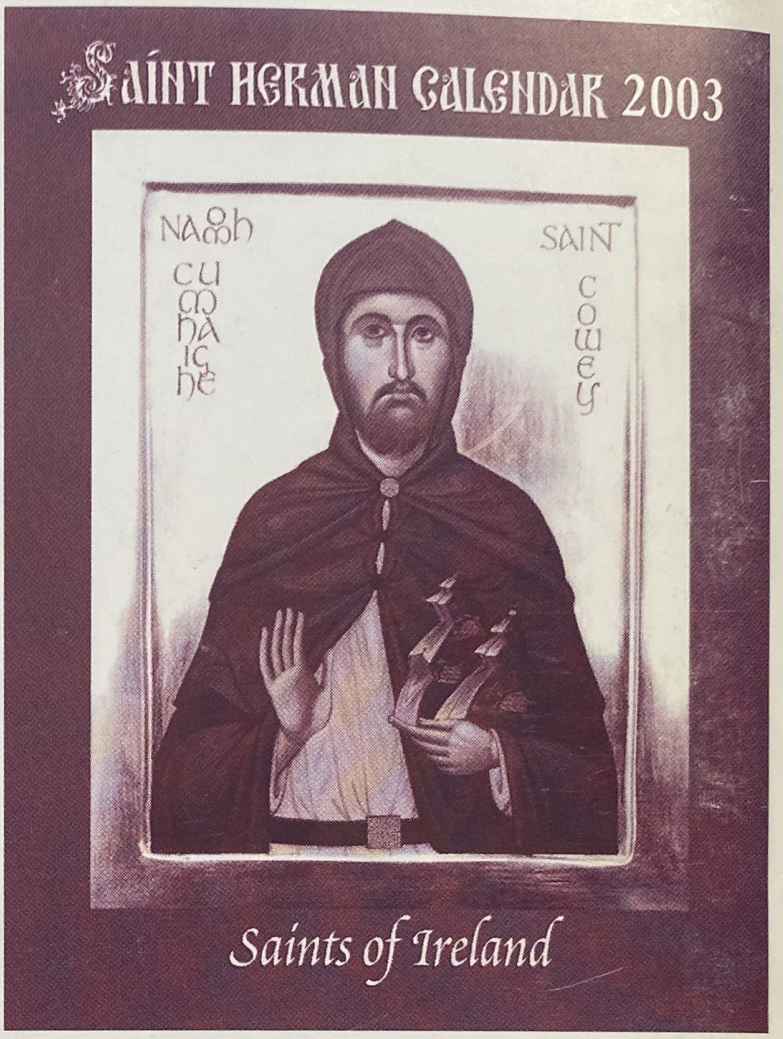

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